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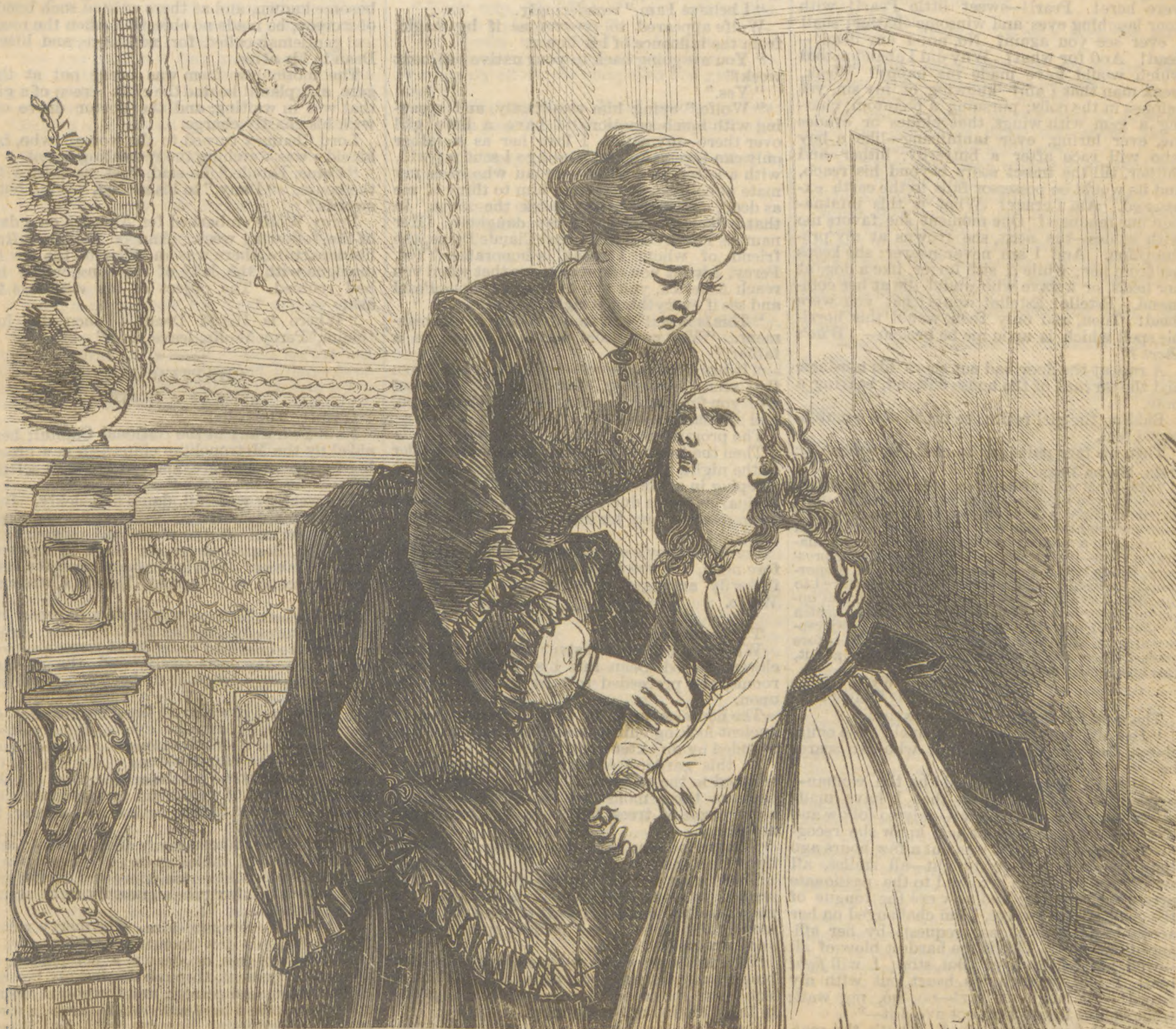
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December 12, 1882.

NO 161. VOL. VII. PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS, 98 WILLIAM ST., N. Y. PRICE, 5 CENTS

PEARL OF PEARLS; OR, CLOUDS AND SUNBEAMS.

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS, JR.



"DEAD! DEAD, DID YOU SAY, MAMMA? NO!—YOU DON'T MEAN IT!"

Pearl of Pearls;

OR,
CLOUDS AND SUNBEAMS.

BY A. P. MORRIS, JR.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUEL IN THE GARDEN.

A SUIT of rooms in the English Metropolis—in what particular locality is of no moment to the reader.

It was night—an ugly night, of damp, and wet, and chill; when starving beggars shivered and groaned, and the higher class drew near to their warm hearths.

A man of muscular build, and aristocratic mien, sat before the glowing grate, with elbows on his knees, and chin bowed to his hands; while he fixed an unwavering stare on the burning coals.

He was alone; yet not alone, for reverie—that great producer of mystical images, and visions of the past—was conjuring pictures, with human forms in their center, so real, so familiar, that it would seem as if they must have heard his addresses when, at last, low words came slowly from his lips:

"America!—far, far land. Ah! I think I see it, beyond the vast waters—see it as I left it; like a thing of life, begging me not to go, and whispering of its smiles and joys, while my own conscience was prophesying this after-regret. Cherished friends, familiar scenes—how have I deserted you!—to accept the companionship of strangers, whose looks are chills, whose presence brings no cheer. Wife!—child! Oh, that Pearl were here! Pearl!—sweet little Pearl! with your laughing eyes and winsome chatter; shall I ever see you again? No, no; I am dead!—dead! And for what? Why did I abandon that which would have made me happy? Weak, weak man that I am!—knowing of my sin, yet helpless in the coils; pursuing a phantom; chasing a gem with wings, that eludes or evades me, ever luring, ever tantalizing—like a boy who will race after a butterfly, hither and thither, till the insect soars beyond his reach, and its would-be possessor falls to the earth exhausted. Am I crazy? What is this infatuation but madness? One moment she favors me with smiles—the next, she frowns at my presumption. And I am never nearer; she keeps me from her; while I still linger, like a dog, at her heels, or a slave who would die at her command. Estelle! Estelle! would that you were dead! Then, and only then, would this horrible spell which is upon me be broken—Who's there?"

A rap at the door had cut short his musings, and the servant of the house entered, bearing a note.

Bidding the girl retire, he broke the escutcheon seal.

Then his face paled, as he read the following:

"MR. HEROD DEAN:
"SIR—This will inform you of a fact of which, evidently, you have been ignorant, up to this time. Estelle Berkely is the betrothed of a gentleman. She—whom you have been following so persistently, and annoying in a manner foreign to the acts of an honorable man—has grown tired of your haunting presence, which has, in her opinion, assumed the proportion of an insult. The matter has been referred to me; and I, as her affianced husband, demand that opportunity for satisfaction, at a weapon's point, which no man, unless he be a coward, will refuse. My representative will call to confer with yours, before noon, to-morrow. For reasons that you will admit, this had best be retained a strict secret."
"HUBERT WYNE,
"LORD CHAUNCEY."

The note fell fluttering to the carpet.

"Her affianced husband! A duel!" He enunciated the words as one will who can scarce believe his senses.

"My God!—that this should be the woman—so beautiful, so fascinating—that I have made myself an outcast to follow!—only to follow and live where I could look at her; know she recognized my presence. It was but a few hours ago that she bade me good-night—all smiles, all sweetness—and gave her hand to the passionate pressure of my lips; and now ere the tongue of the clock strikes twelve, I am challenged on her account—ay, it is at her request—by her affianced husband! This is the hardest blow of all—well, am I fit to live? But, stop; I will fight him! I will wrench his heart out with my sword!—I'll laugh at her!—no, no, no; wait; what should I do? I cannot avoid it—"

"Fight! (hic) Fight who? What's the matter here, Dean? I say, (hic) what's the row!

Why, bless my heart! you're white as a tombstone, and look as mad as a bull in the—(hic)—the arena!"

The speaker was a man several years the junior of Herod Dean, and who had entered the room just at the conclusion of the other's outburst.

His hat was on the back of his head, hair disheveled, and general appearance and stagger indicating that he was right from the "club," with brain rather the worse for liquor.

The two were room-mates.

"Read that," said Dean, in reply, pointing to the crumpled paper at his feet.

The young man picked it up.

"O-h, a duel!" he exclaimed.

"Yes—a duel." Herod Dean was leaning against the mantle-piece, again looking thoughtfully into the fire.

"Well, are you going to fight?"

"Am I?"—suddenly and forcibly. "Do I look like a coward, Percy Wolfe?"

"Aw—n-o; can't say you do," with a half-grave, half-comical survey of his "chum."

"You will be my second?" continued Dean.

"Of course I will." And Wolfe was slightly familiar with such matters, for he immediately added, in a business manner:

"You'd better go to work now—make out your will, and so forth, you know. See, there's no telling how these things will turn out; and, in case you are unfortunate, why it's better to prevent trouble among relations by putting law on paper—"

"I attended to that some time ago."

"Oh! did you?" in surprise.

"Yes." Then Dean advanced and laid a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Percy Wolfe," he said, very solemnly, "you are an American, like myself."

"I believe I am," wonderingly.

Wolfe appeared to recover, as if by magic, from the influence of his liquor.

"You are going back to your native soil next week?"

"Yes."

"Wolfe," eying him steadfastly, and speaking with much emotion, "I have a little girl over there—my child. I love her as a father only can love. A short time ago I sent my will, with a letter, to a friend—a man who was my mate at college—instructing him to think of me as dead, and have others think the same. In that will I provided for my daughter. Her name is Pearl. I believe that Claude Paine, the friend of whom I speak, is honorable. Yet, Percy, I want you to promise me that when you reach America, you will find my precious Pearl and see if everything is right."

"This is news!" exclaimed Wolfe, in astonishment. "You never told me that you were a father."

"It has been a secret—and you shall learn that secret presently. But, will you promise? will you find Pearl Rochestine, at Washington, and see that she has her own?"

The promise was given.

Then the two sat there, through the remainder of the night, till the gray shades of dawn were creeping in at the windows, discussing the preliminaries to the duel; and in that time Herod Dean made known his life secret to this warm, faithful friend.

Lord Chauncey's second was prompt to call before noon, and the affair of meeting was satisfactorily arranged between that worthy and Wolfe.

Twelve hours later.

When the bell of a distant clock proclaimed eleven, Herod Dean and his friend left their rooms, and proceeded toward the spot agreed upon.

The house occupied by Lord Chauncey was an ancient-looking edifice, standing alone, and surrounded by an extensive garden.

In this garden were many places admirably adapted to the coming scene; but one especially, between three monstrous shrub-bushes, within a semicircle of trees, had been selected by the nobleman.

The ground was hard and smooth; the situation was screened.

There was a moon in the starry sky, that seemed to pour a saddened radiance on the place; and an occasional waft of wind whispered mournfully through the leafless, spectral trees and bare-stalked shrubs.

Two men were waiting—one engaged in rubbing a long, sharp sword with a piece of chamois skin; and the other, gloomy and silent, gazing in the direction of the gate.

Soon the other parties were on hand; and—doing away with useless prelude—the enemies were placed, weapon in hand, face to face.

"Lord Chauncey," said Dean, "remember that this quarrel is of your seeking. I am no coward; yet to shed blood is a serious thing. And I ask if there is no other way to adjust this?"

"Guard!" was the answer, sharp and savage, as the speaker advanced quickly. "Look to yourself—"

Clash! rung the snaky swords, and the combat opened.

Both were good swordsmen; the match, in point of strength, was equal.

Circling and darting, ringing and scraping, twisting and twining, whirling, like two supple snakes, whizzed and coiled the dueling swords in the hands of their masters; and nothing was heard but the whizzing, striking sound and deep breathing of the combatants.

Suddenly Dean slipped. His weapon fell slightly. Quick as a flash the Englishman lunged at the exposed breast of his antagonist, and pierced him through and through.

The stricken man reeled backward, tossed his arms wildly aloft, and fell into the arms of Percy Wolfe, who sprung to catch him.

"Wolfe! Wolfe!" he articulated in a choking voice, "remember your promise! God! I am dying!"

"Horace Rochestine, I will remember!" whispered Percy.

Lord Chauncey was coolly wiping his sword.

Two figures were approaching rapidly from the house—a man and woman. When they came up, the latter asked:

"Is it over?"

"Yes," and the Englishman continued, addressing her companion: "There he is, doctor. You had best be quick in removing him."

Wolfe would have preferred to bury his friend; but, as the occurrence might possibly become known, and as there existed such bonds of secrecy, he made no objection when the medical gentleman called for assistance, and lifted Dean in his arms.

The motionless form was borne out at the gate, and placed behind the cloth screen of a gig that was in waiting, and the doctor drove off with his ghastly charge.

Lord Chauncey turned to the woman, who, by his side, was watching the retreating forms.

"Come, Estelle," he said, "let us return to the house. 'Dany,' to his second, 'bring both swords.'"

Percy Wolfe embarked for America on a day of the following week. And on the day after his departure, there was an officer of the law in dialogue with the lady of the house where he had roomed. The object of his visit was to ask:

"Where is Herod Dean? When did his 'chum,' Percy Wolfe, leave here?"

CHAPTER II.

NEWS OF A DEATH.

HARK! The bells!

New Year's day at the National Capital; heralded by the Metropolitan chimes—a new greeting for the season here, and one of sweet solemnity.

The weather was dull, damp and sickly. But this mattered nothing; "society" conquered the whisperings of discretion, and moved, as it ever will, despite inclement skies, in keeping with the laws of festivity ensuing upon the last, parting scene of the Old Year's Christmas month.

Here, where Fashion would seem to center its rarest pictures during the Holidays, and smile with all the charmed radiance of woman's loveliness, the day was lively, and the gloomy clouds forgotten by pleasure-bent votaries of sociability.

A house, not much more than the distance of an arrow-shot from Lafayette Square—an which escaped mention among the long list that appeared in the *Gazette*—was glittering in its interior; with broad salons arranged in all the lavish grandeur of wealth and taste, and liveried sons of Ebon-skin flitting hither and thither, in useful capacities.

The callers had been many at this point; and yet the shining tables groaned beneath their weight of delicacies—rich wines and fruits, and all that could intoxicate a guest by sight, scent, or indulgence.

But now there was a calm. The merry voices that had only a few moments previous awakened echoes of jest, or drawn a companion, in pleasant argument, through the dreamy bowers of Erudition, had ceased; and the gorgeous surroundings looked bare without their recent foreground of grouping humans. All had disappeared—all, save one.

Seated at the piano, her elbow on the mirrored wood, and face resting in her jeweled hand, was a woman—a queen, it would appear, well fitted to reign in this modern Temple of Delight.

Asher bowed, and one hand lay carelessly on the keys, her attitude was one of thought—full of grace, a subject for an artist.

A brunette, and beautiful.

She had been thus ever since she bade adieu to the last departing visitor; with eyelids drooping and brilliant orbs dreamily lustering behind the silken lash; and strange, strange meditations were training through her mind.

Presently there sounds a light footfall on the carpet. She roused with a start.

"Pearl—is it you?"

"Yes mamma. I'm tired playing all by myself; and I have been alone, for Jessie said she must go see her sick mother."

A fairy it was who spoke; a child of not more than fourteen years, yet with a face that told of intellect almost womanly, and beaming in all the sweetness of a soul of gold.

Over her smooth, white shoulder, that rose like a hill of tinted snow above the costly trimming of her low-cut bodice, there fell a profusion of flaxen hair; her features like her form—with eyes of blue, brows of jet, lips of red, and teeth as pure as the name she bore—all these, augmented by the glow of health, made up a picture of heavenly mold.

"I told Jessie she must not leave you," returned the woman to the child's last speech.

"Oh mamma! but her mother was sick. You wouldn't want her to stay away, would you? And you won't be angry with her for it? Why, if you was sick, I'd come to you no matter what happened."

"Would you, Pearl?"

"Yes, I would?"

The dark-eyed beauty drew Pearl toward her, and bent to kiss the pure forehead; though that kiss was cold and the action forced.

"But you must not stay here, Pearl. There may be visitors at any moment; and mamma would rather you did not see rude men, and hear how they talk. Go now—"

"But it's so lonely all by myself!" interrupted the child.

"Here's a letter for Mrs. Rochestine," said a servant, who came in at that juncture, with a missive on a heavy salver. "It was got out of the post-office early this morning by the man you sent there."

While Pearl gazed silently into the face of the queenly woman she had called "mamma," the latter broke the fancy seal of the envelope, and tore it open.

"Why, mamma, how red your cheeks are!" exclaimed the girl.

"Are they, pet? Ha! ha!" a laugh that was unnatural, even in its music; "well, it's the heat of the room, and the excitement I have been through. Your cheeks would be red, too, if you had all to do that I have been doing this morning—"

"Oh, how I wish I could try and see!" broke in Pearl, while a hopeful light came into her deep blue eyes. "Don't you think I might help you to entertain? I know I'm only a foolish little girl, mamma; but it's not so very hard to be good-humored, and maybe some one would not think it a hard task to talk with me—"

"There, there, Pearl; go, go now, child. Hark! some one is coming. Don't you see I wish to be alone?" the last with a slight show of impatience.

Pearl glanced at her keenly for a second, then, with a little sigh, she turned away.

When Isabel Rochestine was alone, she opened the letter and read it. It was post-marked Baltimore, Dec. 31st.

The tinge on her cheeks mantled higher, as she perused the lines on the paper, and her full bosom heaved with a warmth occasioned by the words of the perfumed missive.

At last she placed it to her lips, kissing it passionately, and cried, half-aloud:

"He is coming! coming! will be here to-day! He may enter at any time! Claude! Claude! would that I were free! would that you knew how madly, madly I love you!" and again and again she pressed the letter to her lips, imprinting kisses on the name at the bottom of the sheet.

A tinkle of the door-bell checked her outburst, and she listened, holding her breath to the footfalls of the comer in the hall.

"It is he!—Claude!"

A tall, broad-shouldered man, handsome in figure, attractive in face, with bright, piercing hazel eyes, and curly hair of similar hue; white, even teeth glistening beneath a luxuriant mustache; elastic in movement, and with a bearing of command.

This was Claude Paine, the writer of the letter, who entered the saloon parlor, and stood before the woman who expected him.

But, her manner was altered. All traces of that eagerness and momentary excitement which, a second previous, had possessed her, now vanished. She was calm, smiling, courteous merely, as she extended a hand in greeting.

"Mr. Paine."

"Ah! Mrs. Rochestine—let me hope you are enjoying all the pleasures of 'the season?' A happy New Year."

"And for you, I wish the same. Be seated."

"By the contents of your card-basket, I judge you have not been lonely to-day," he said, drawing up a chair.

"Oh, no!" laughing lightly. "To be candid—with you—I am almost tired of shaking hands, listening to compliments, and taxing my brains to entertain those few bores who seem to have nothing to say when they enter a lady's parlor. It is fortunate this occurs only once a year."

"Fortunate for your endurance, perhaps, Mrs. Rochestine; but—but—"

"Well? Another piece of flattery, I suppose? You are merciless as the rest."

"It is unfortunate for others that New Year's day does not come around more frequently."

"Why, pray?"

"Can you ask? Is it not a source of happiness to be near one whom we admire?"

She arched her brows.

"Even though we must be content oft-times with one-half of that admiration unspoken," he added; and continued, after a pause, during which his eyes seemed to read her inmost thoughts:

"Once under the influence of your society, Mrs. Rochestine, it is severe for a weak mortal to realize, that—"

"Your trip, Mr. Paine?" she interrupted.

"Had you a pleasant one?"

Her cheeks were dyed in blushes, and a strange, mesmeric sensation crept over her, as, by a mighty effort, she compelled her glance to meet his.

A peculiar expression flitted across his face; but it was gone instantly, when he replied to her question.

"Yes, a very pleasant trip, indeed—that is, in one sense."

"How?"

"And quite unpleasant in another."

He looked gravely at her, and she saw that he hesitated in communicating something.

"What is it, Mr. Paine?"

"I regret exceedingly that I should be the bearer—"

"No matter; tell me. What is it?"

"Bad news—very bad," he uttered, slowly, now gazing down, as if to avoid her anxious look.

"Tell—me!" two low, breathless words, and the color began to recede from her face.

"Mrs. Rochestine, I beg of you receive, as calmly as possible, what I am about to say. Your husband—"

"My husband?" quickly.

"Is—is—"

"Mr. Paine will you speak!"

"He is dead."

"Dead!" the words came spasmodically, and she gazed in doubt.

Feeling that he had gotten over the greatest difficulty, he went on with more ease:

"Yes; by a letter from a friend of mine, which I received while in New York, I learn that Horace Rochestine died in London, some months ago, of fever. There was a paper inclosed, too, announcing his decease. You have my sincerest sympathy and condolence—ha! you are sick, Mrs. Rochestine! Permit me."

He hastily poured a glass full of wine, and proffered it to her; for she was pale, and swayed dizzily in her seat.

But, Isabel Rochestine forgot, for the moment, that he was present.

It was not alone this news of the death of her husband that worked upon her, as she stared, in a vacant way, at the carpet; other thoughts were consuming her mind—inevitably aroused by the unexpected intelligence. From paleness, her face changed back to its dye of crimson; her veins were heated, her bosom rose and fell with quick, short respirations; and from her lips issued a scarce audible whisper—one word:

"Free!"

It was not meant for other ears; but Claude Paine heard it, and a startling thrill passed over him as he drew a step nearer her chair, and fixed a deep, deep glance on the bowed head of this beautiful woman.

CHAPTER III.

A MEETING IN THE DARK.

NECESSARILY passing over the day, until we reach an hour after nightfall, we turn to the long, low bridge that stretches over the Eastern Branch that leads to quiet Uniontown.

Near by the "draw," thickly muffled—not so much on account of cold, as to defy the searching damp which lurked, like a curseful malaria, on the bosom of the dark water—a man was pacing restlessly to and fro, at times straining his eyes in the direction of the north end of the bridge, and uttering impatient syllables.

"It is time he showed himself!" he exclaimed, at last, pausing and gazing steadfastly along the outline of the white railing. "He is behind time; and I have waited till I can be patient no longer."

And then the head of the solitary personage hung forward, and he continued, in a musing strain:

"What if he should disappoint me? His letter told me to be punctual, and he is the tardy one. In Baltimore, yesterday, eh? Been to New York? I wonder what excuse he will make to Isabel Rochestine, for the unexplained absence and silence of her husband? And I wonder what the deuce is up—that he should be so anxious for me to secure a woman who is willing to go away, with a child? It's just like Claude Paine—he always was a mystery to me. But it pays me to hold my tongue, do his bidding, and so retain his friendship; and I don't care beyond that. Ah! that's him, now."

A second figure was on the bridge; the rapid thud of heels told the comer was approaching hastily.

"Is that you, Paine?"

"Yes—Derrick?"

"Ay. What kept you?"

"Am I late?"

"Rather!"—dryly. "What's been the matter?"

"Not now; wait until we get to the rendezvous. Have you seen the negress?"

"Yes; and every thing is fixed."

They were walking swiftly, arm in arm, toward the drug-store light, that shone like a brilliant beacon at the south end.

"All fixed, eh? She's willing to go—and do."

"Yes, for good pay."

"I'll attend to that portion, never fear."

When they were off the bridge they turned to the left through Uniontown—passing the spectral Willow above the bakery shop, and taking a "short cut" across the lots, in the direction of the steep hills that rear at the back of the little burgh.

"Our precautions are none too soon," said Paine.

"What do you mean? Your letter was very mysterious."

"Ha! ha! Was it? Well, you shall be 'posted' directly. I have made better progress than I anticipated. But, I say, wait."

Striking a worm-like road which led up the steep ascent, they continued briskly on with hardly a word. As they neared a house that surrounded one of the tree-bared eminences, the music of guitars and violins reached their ears, and they quickened their pace, lest some straggler, drawn thither by the sound, should discover and suspicion them.

"Hurry, Derrick."

"I'm hurrying all I can, along this treacherous place. I guess nobody's going to see us. But, I say, while other people are having fun, we'll plot, eh?" alluding to the merry company assembled in the house at their right.

Close to Fort Staunton stands a dilapidated frame building, with a crumbling porch half-way round it—a signal-office at one time, perhaps, but now, with the deserted fort, one of the lonely monuments of the recent Rebellion—a point of elevation where the distant city's lights could be seen gleaming and reflecting like the scintillations from a fairy realm.

This was, evidently, the place of rendezvous mentioned by Claude Paine; for, ascending the rickety steps at one side, the two men halted.

A third party awaited them here—a woman, who stepped forward as they came up.

"Here we are, Cassa," said the man named Derrick, in a low tone.

"An' here I is, too," returned the woman, briefly; and, by her thick, guttural voice, we discover her to be a negress.

"I've brought the gentleman who is to make the arrangement with you," he pursued.

"Who is de gen'leman? What his name?"

"Mr. Claude Paine."

"Mr. Claude Paine," repeated the negress, quickly; and had it not been for the darkness

we might have noticed a start, a strain of the eyes, as if to see the features of the one with whom she was about to make a bargain.

"Has Mr. Derrick told you what I want you to do?"

"Told me come; didn't say what you's goin' to give me, dough."

"If you take the child where it may never be seen by me again, I'll pay you two hundred dollars. And, besides, if you keep me informed of your whereabouts, I'll allow you sufficient funds monthly, to live comfortably on. But, mind, there must be no half-way management about it. I will have to deceive the child, in order to get her away; and when she finds out the trick she may try to escape you. In that case, you will, perhaps, have to resort to pretty stern measures. Are you ready to act?"

"I is."

"Very well. Now, remember: I shall take the child to the depot, to-morrow afternoon; will be on hand in time for the 5.40 train. See that you are promptly there. Have you good clothes?"

"Nothin' but dese rags."

"Then here is money to begin with. Buy a decent outfit, and look respectable when you meet me. Strike a match, Derrick."

Derrick ignited a lucifer, and held it so that his companion could see to extract some money from his pocket-book.

Paine drew forth twenty dollars and reached it toward her.

But he paused, with hand outstretched, and eyes riveted on the face of the negress; and something in her black countenance, her peculiar poise, her strange glance—or all three combined—perplexed him.

The match sputtered itself out; the spell was broken.

"Here—take it. You may go now. Be sure that you do not disappoint me."

"Where is I to take de chile?"

"Anywhere. The further off the better."

Mumbling some sort of promise to fulfill her part, Cassa, the negress, turned from them, descended the steps of rotten wood and rickety build, and presently vanished in the gloom.

"Derrick," said Paine, thoughtfully, when they were alone, "I've seen that woman before somewhere."

"The deuce you have! Impossible!—why, they all look alike to me. I guess you're mistaken."

"No, I'm not; I'm sure of it."

"Well, I don't suppose it makes much difference, if you have. Tell me about your visit to-day. You said, in your letter, that you'd call on Isabel Rochestine as soon as you got here."

"And so I did. Derrick—I can't get that woman out of my mind. Did she tell you where she lived?"

"Over in Howard Town. But, pshaw!—quit your nonsense. What of Horace Rochestine?"

"I heard from him."

"Well?"

"He's dead."

"Eh?—no?"

"Sh! not so loud. What's that?"

There was a rustling of leaves and twigs, among the undergrowth, at one side of the little house, and Paine pointed toward the spot from whence came the sound.

"It's nothing. Perhaps a stray dog—yes; I told you so."

The shrill bark of a cur, not many yards off, broke the ominous silence which surrounded them; and Claude Paine, satisfied it was not the presence of an eavesdropper, which had startled him, resumed:

"Yes, Horace Rochestine is dead—dead to the world; at least, he said in his letter to me, that he wished me to circulate the rumor, as he would never again return to America."

"Phew!" exclaimed Derrick, with a whistle.

"He inclosed his will, too."

Paine was still thoughtful in manner, as if his mind dwelt simultaneously on other things.

"Don't say so? Then he is still infatuated with the English woman?"

"Yes. He says he must be considered dead by those who knew him in America; and means to begin life anew in London, under another name. But this will is the thing, Derrick."

"What about it?"

"We know that Horace Rochestine never did love Isabel, his present wife; that the marriage was made up between the two families, after the death of his first wife—hence, his easy yielding to the fascinating charms of a woman far more beautiful than Isabel."

"Yes; but what has that got to do with the will?"

"A great deal. He has not left Isabel one penny of his wealth."

"H-o!"

"Everything goes to the child of his first wife—everything."

"That's Pearl?"

"Yes."

"And what do you propose? Are you going to prove as good a friend as he thinks you are?"

"Am I a fool, Dorsey Derrick! Of course I love Isabel Rochestine—after my own way—but if she is not going to bring me anything in money, I would rather let her alone. She has very little of her own; since her father, when he died—the old ass!—left the bulk of his accumulations to charitable purposes."

"You will marry her, then?"

"Certainly I shall. When a man's will is made out, and he is believed to be dead, there can hardly be much harm in marrying his widow! That is why I wrote to you, to secure a woman who could serve me. I must get Pearl out of the way."

"That's it, eh? Well, now, I was wondering—"

"As I said, I have made wonderful progress. You and I will soon be sailing in smooth waters, Derrick, with plenty of money."

"And you won't 'shake' your old friend, now that you are getting along so fine?"

"'Shake' you Derrick? If I do, may I die for it!"

The two grasped hands, and then, after a few more words, started away from the spot, pursuing a different route this time to reach the main road.

As they skulked along by the fence, between the two houses on the hills, a party of ladies and gentlemen crossed their path; but, soon these were out of sight, and they again moved forward—ere long reaching the bridge, and crossing over into the city.

But, it was not a dog that had startled the plotters, when they stood on the porch of the deserted house. They were no sooner gone than a figure emerged from the bushes, and moved down the hill, by an opposite path.

It was Cassa, the negress.

CHAPTER IV.

BETROTHED IN AN HOUR OF DEATH.

"FREE!" was the one, strange word that fell from the lips of Isabel Rochestine—followed by a long silence, in which she and the handsome Claude Paine formed a tableau almost weird in its attitude.

"Did you speak, Mrs. Rochestine?"

His question roused her. She started, and looked up into his face.

"Did I?"—whisperingly. "I scarce know. Oh! this is fearful news, Mr. Paine."

But there were no tears in her eyes, to make natural the tremor of her voice.

"As I said: I regret that I have had to be the bearer of this. I do not wonder that it is all the more severe coming at this hour of gayety and pleasure."

"It is so unexpected! I—Mr. Paine—will you excuse me? You must see that I—I need to be alone—" she arose, and would have left him; but he interrupted, and detained her.

"Nay, Mrs. Rochestine—one moment. At such a time as this, the sympathy of a friend—I mean an old and sincere friend, like myself—ought to give nearly as much comfort to a wounded heart, as the balm of flowing tears. And I know it is because you would weep that you wish to retire. At least, you will not go before I have uttered one word?"

"You are very kind, Mr. Paine—"

"Sit down, I beg."

"Wait." She struck a silver bell that was upon the table, bringing one of the hall servants to her presence.

"Close the house, immediately. To any one who may call again, to-day, say, without exception, that I am unwell, and can receive no visitors."

The servant withdrew, marveling as he went, to execute her order.

"It has been long since you saw your husband, Mrs. Rochestine?" said Paine, when they were alone.

"Over a year," she answered, slowly, sinking back into a large chair, and toying nervously with the watch-charms at her belt.

"And, in that time, you have heard very little of him."

"Very little."

"And what may, or may not, have been his thoughts of you?"

"Mr. Paine!" She darted a quick glance at

him—one that, good reader of faces as he was, he could not comprehend; for it did not express the reproof her words seemed to convey.

There was a long pause. He had something important to speak of, a subject to touch upon which was dangerous, just then, in his opinion; though he had made this woman a study, and thought he knew her well.

And it is, generally, a rule: that, when a man thinks he knows a woman best, then is the time he knows her least.

His gaze roamed around the room, as if to make sure of their privacy; then centered on her.

Her head was drooping; her mind was engaged—perhaps with thoughts of Horace Rochestine, her husband.

"Mrs. Rochestine—we have known each other for many years. I am conceited enough to imagine that you value me as a friend. I have something very serious to say to you; but, before I do, I must obtain your promise of leniency."

"What is it?" and the large black orbs turned on him.

"You are, now, a widow. I think you are a woman whose life is incomplete if passed alone. You are not one to wear the widow's weeds during the balance of your days. Tell me: do you think you will ever marry again?"

"That is a singular question, Mr. Paine—and at such a time!"

"Not so singular, when considering how great the import of its answer is, to me."

Then, with a fervency he could no longer restrain, he continued, as he advanced to the side of her chair:

"Isabel Rochestine, let me say much in a few words. When I first met you, years ago, I felt as if there was but one woman on the earth who could make me happy—that one, yourself. But, ere I could tell you of this feeling, Horace Rochestine, through some arrangement between your family and his, snatched you away, as I then feared, forever. Since the day you became his wife, I have been a devoted friend to both; ay, have not my speeches, my actions, my looks told you, that, for you, there was a more than mere friendship in my heart? You are no longer a wife, but a widow—free! I heard you breathe the word, only a moment since. And all this is to tell you, Isabel, that I love you, worship you—ask you to consider my love. This is why I detained you. Look up at me: have I been too precipitate?—are you angry?"

We know that Isabel Rochestine loved this man. Hers was a passionate nature, when not checked by the rigid bit of "Society," and as he poured forth his confession, a hot fire seemed coursing in her veins, warming her whole frame.

Her face was crimson; something inaudible faltered from her lips.

"Isabel?"

"Mr. Paine!—Claude! do you—do you love me?"

"If I have not convinced you of it yet, I ask you to be my wife; and you shall see that I more than love you, by the attention I will ever pay to your slightest wish. Your answer, Isabel?"

With a quick movement, she threw her arms around his neck; and her face, with its blushes, its two soft gazing eyes and honeyed lips, was turned to his.

"Claude!—yes! I have loved you always. Have you not seen it? Though Horace could never say his wife was not all she should be, I have, still, tried in vain to put out the tiny flame that burned in my heart for you. I am yours, Claude! Oh! do not say you love me, unless you mean it."

"Love is a word too weak, Isabel—idolize were better."

It was strange to see this beautiful being in the embrace of a man who, till now, was kept from her by the holy relation of another—within the same hour that she learned of that other's death. If it was sinful to so easily forget the husband who, she was told, had died abroad, then there is but one excuse; the irresistible magnetism of love, and the power of its blisses to expel gloom.

"When you have laid aside your robes of mourning, Isabel, you will be my wife?"

"Yes. But—" she seemed to suddenly remember something.

"But what?"

"You forget: I have a child. A man may love, Claude, but, I know that the truest of lovers, when they marry, hesitate to take more than the single object of their affection."

"You are right. And I am no exception. But, when we marry, I shall want to take you a long way from here—and, is it necessary for Pearl to go with us? She is not your own."

child; hence, it will not be so hard to part with her."

"Explain."

"Can we not send her to some boarding-school, or private establishment of learning?"

"True. I did not think of that."

"If you will leave it to me, I can manage it."

The door-bell rung at that juncture; but they heeded it not. The lovers were already rapt in each other, oblivious to all things save those thrills of joy which seemed to alternate between them, as they stood there, soul in soul, and lip to lip.

But Isabel's quick ear detected a footstep in the adjoining *salon*; and in a moment she escaped his arms, and seated herself at the piano.

None too soon. A card was brought her. It was left by the party who rung the bell, and who failed to gain admittance, through her recent order.

"PERCY WOLFE," she read, aloud, from the card.

"Who is he?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I never met him, or heard of him before," and the card was tossed carelessly upon the piano.

"Yes, Claude, I will leave it all to you," Isabel said, presently.

"I do not think you ever loved Pearl over-much."

"Oh! how can you say that? She is the child of my dead husband. Of course I love her!"

"Still you do not hesitate in leaving me to arrange for her future?"

"No; for I believe you will see that it is a comfortable arrangement. How soon will you be able to take her away?"

"At once."

"At once?" in surprise.

"Yes. You will find that I can fix matters speedily—in fact, Isabel, I ventured a little on the crisis of this hour, and have already taken steps."

"Indeed?"

"Pearl can go to-morrow. Had you not better call her in, and acquaint her with the plan?"

Pearl was summoned.

"Pearl," said her stepmother, when she came in, "this is Mr. Paine. You remember him, do you not?"

"Yes, I remember," shaking hands with him, and then retiring, shyly, to her mother's side.

"He has brought us bad news, pet—of your father."

"What is it, mamma? Why do you look so solemn? Has anything happened?"

"My little girl," said Paine, gravely, "have you a stout heart?"

"I don't know; I've never had cause to try it yet. What's it all about, mamma?"

"Darling—your father is dead! We are all alone!" She spoke hushedly, and with emotion. Part of this was simulated—much was natural; for she was but a woman, after all, and knew how deep, deep to the child's soul must cut those dread words.

The large blue eyes widened, as they turned from one to the other of the two: but Paine's glance, if anything, was stern, and her mother's head was bowed.

"Dead! Dead, did you say, mamma? no!—you don't mean it!"

There was no answer.

Like a lily that has been smitten by the storm, Pearl bent under this terrible news. Her head drooped, and the lips quivered, as she struggled to keep down the threatening tears.

Young as she was, she knew the inestimable value of a father's love, and how hard to lose it; she had worshiped him as only a child could worship that one who, in every way, was a kind, indulgent parent.

"Dead!" she repeated, as if still doubting that she heard aright; and then she stood there, statue-like and silent, her bosom agonized with grief, her tongue powerless to speak more.

But a quick change came over her.

Suddenly she started forward, and winding her arms around her mother's neck, cried:

"Don't let us be too sad, mamma! We can't help it. Papa is happier in heaven than he would be here. See—I'm not crying now."

As Pearl had said, she was never before made to test the true strength of her nature; and now, in the moment of the ordeal, Claude Paine saw that it was one of iron.

"I am not weeping, pet; my heart is too full of woe, even for that. But I feel for you."

"Never mind me, mamma. Perhaps when I get by myself I shall have a sad time; but I'm strong now."

"Mr. Paine and I have been talking of your future, child," said Isabel, rather abruptly.

"My future?"

"Yes. Would you not like to go to boarding-school?"

"To boarding-school! Why, mamma, I have my governess here; can't she teach me well enough?"

"But I am going away."

"Where to?" asked Pearl, surprisedly.

"To California, where my uncle lives. And while I am gone, I had much rather see you at boarding-school, where you will be tenderly cared for."

"But why can't I go with you?"

"Impossible. Now, you must not be disobedient, Pearl, dear. Remember it is mamma's wish; and everything is for your good."

"When am I to go?"

"To-morrow."

"So soon! And when are you going?"

"Very shortly."

"Oh, mamma, don't you go! It will be so lonesome for me. Why, I won't have anybody. Please don't go." And the two dimpled arms clung tighter to her neck, as the child pleaded.

"There, there, Pearl; I'm sad enough as it is. Don't make me more miserable by acting this way. You'll do as I want you to?"

For a second Pearl hesitated.

"Yes," came at last from the trembling lips.

Paine arose.

"I must bid you good-day now, Mrs. Rochestine. If Pearl will be ready by four P.M. to-morrow, I will call for her."

"She will be ready. Let me see you to the door."

At the door of the next *salon* the lovers parted. A passionate embrace, a kiss, and Claude Paine went out.

When he met his worthy associate that night on the Eastern Branch bridge, he had good cause for saying that he had progressed finely.

Pearl was standing where they had left her when her stepmother returned, with her fair head hung in sorrow, and one small hand resting on her bosom, as if to still the throbbings of a pained heart.

She did not notice Isabel; seemed oblivious to everything but this great cloud which encompassed her—the first to darken her hitherto sunny life.

Isabel Rochestine swept past her, bestowing a side glance upon her, then stopped to repeat that glance ere she disappeared beyond the doorway.

CHAPTER V.

DID SHE MURDER HIM?

WE must, in order to develop an essential portion of our narrative, take the reader back a space, to London, to the house of Lord Chauncy, to that date when Herod Dean fell beneath the sword of the man who had proclaimed himself the affianced husband of Estelle Berkely, and her thirsty champion.

The nobleman's second, in the fatal duel, was his valet; and when his employer retired to an apartment in the upper story of the house, accompanied by the woman who retained his arm, he (the valet) discreetly withdrew from their presence.

Our two characters were soon seated in a luxuriously-furnished room, where brilliant lights blazed, and cast brilliant scintillations from the chandelier of quivering prisms.

The Englishman was a personage calculated to attract and repel, simultaneously—sufficiently handsome to engage attention, and hold the same by a peculiar power which lurked in his hard, piercing eyes; while his general appearance, once studied, was less than common.

Of his companion, little can be said: save that, when she had thrown aside her shawl, and drawn a chair near to him, we see that she is glittering, from head to waist, in jewels; and, in form and feature, was rather stout, not what good taste admits to be beautiful—yet peculiarly voluptuous and attractive.

"I am rejoiced, my lord, to know that you escaped without even a scratch," she said; "I really feared for you, because I knew Herod Dean was no child in the use of the sword."

"True; he was no child. When I crossed weapons with him, I found a dangerous match. I am favored by fortune. Had it not been for his slipping, no doubt I would have fallen."

"Then I should now be miserable, Lord Chauncy."

"Why do you persist in addressing me with title? Call me Hubert. One would think we had never even kissed—to say nothing of the fact that we are to be married soon!"

"Hubert, then—I cannot imagine what you see in me, that you should wish to make me your wife."

Till now, his eyes were bent upon the carpet; and she with a glance that could but tell of craftiness, was regarding him covertly.

He looked up quickly—to meet a face expressing the simple inquiry, and of studied calmness.

"Everything!" he exclaimed, impulsively; "everything that a man, who is not cold to passion, must be attracted by! I know that your blood is as good as mine; I know that few women possess an intellect such as yours—and an educated woman is the rarest gem of earth!—and, more than all, Estelle, your mirror must have told you how beautiful you are. Are not these enough?"

"I believe you do love me, Hubert."

"And you are not mistaken in that belief. Why should I offer to marry you?—why bequeath the most part of my wealth to you?—want to be always with you, if I did not love you?"

"Have you made such a will, Hubert?—when there are others, of your own kin, more deserving."

"I am the judge of that, my queen."

"And, I suppose, the mysterious document is deposited in some wonderful hiding-place, etc., like what we read about, to be discovered in a romantic manner, eh?"

It was artfully put, and the blinded lover did not suspect that the low, careless laugh which followed, was a piece of able acting.

"Oh, no; I only had it witnessed this afternoon. It is in my desk, in the library."

She arose with an affected sigh.

"Ayho!—well—I must bid you good-night, Hubert; I am weary."

"Going without a kiss!" and he stepped toward her with outstretched arms.

She presented her ripe, red mouth; and then, when he had held her to him for a second, she left him in solitude.

Alone in her *boudoir*, Estelle Berkely was an altered woman.

Her brown, flashing eyes lighted ominously, and a half-loud musing broke from her false, hypocritical lips.

"So! he has made out his will! I must secure it; and mayhap fate will, sometime, give me its benefits. But, I must not remain here. I have removed one eyesore, by skillful management; now I must flee from the other. Love him?—never! I could no more marry him than I could marry his cross-eyed valet! Let me secure the will—and then, adieu to England!"

"Madame is late retiring to-night."

Her little maid, a French girl with twinkling eyes and merry voice, had entered from the next room.

"Will madame disrobe?"

"Yes, Fifi; and hurry, for I am tired to death."

"Ah, ciel! it is awful to be tired to death. I will make haste," and she continued to chatter in a lively strain while she aided her mistress.

The following day was a marvel of beauty, with sunshine and warmth, and an atmosphere as clear and pure as a draught from the "starry goblets" of the Immortals.

Notwithstanding the small amount of repose he had obtained, Lord Chauncy was astir at ten o'clock, and sent a message to his affianced, inviting her to a drive in an open barouche.

She accepted, and they were soon speeding gayly over one of the fashionable courses, where others before them were enjoying the balmy air and invigorating scene.

"Ho, there! Lord Chauncy—hold!" called a voice, from a barouche that was whirling past.

The nobleman recognized one of his most intimate friends, and instantly ordered his driver to halt.

The other barouche turned, and was soon beside him.

"Lord Chauncy, delighted to see you!"

"The delight is mutual!" cried Chauncy, grasping the extended hand. "When did you return?"

"Only last night. I have invitations out for dinner this afternoon, at five. I was, this moment, on my way to your house, and—ah! pardon my rudeness, Miss Berkely," raising his hat in a profound bow. "You, of course, will not deprive us of your presence at the party?"

"I venture she will accompany me," said Lord Chauncy, as he turned inquiringly to her.

"It is always a pleasure to me, to think that I can add to the harmony of a company, or make myself agreeable to those around me," was Estelle's reply, with a gracious smile.

"Rest assured, we can not enjoy ourselves without you!" he declared, gallantly. Then, an undertone: "A splendid woman, Chauncy! You've got a jewel! Hurry up and marry her, before she slips away"—adding, aloud: "A revoir! I shall expect you both."

Bowing again, he ordered his driver forward; while Chauncy, as he and Estelle were again moving along the smooth drive—watched by many who admired the flash livery and shining equipage—sat thinking, in a splendid humor, of the compliment his friend had paid to the bride-elect.

Among all the ladies who graced the parlors at the house of Lord Chauncy's friend, that afternoon, none were as lovely as Estelle Berkeley—none drew more attention, nor were the recipients of more gallant praise. With her beauty, she captivated; with her conversation, she doubled that captivation; and Lord Chauncy, not of a jealous nature, marked this exhibition of favor with growing pride—marked, also, the envious glances darted at his betrothed by those less beautiful than she.

But the nobleman withdrew at an early hour, pleading fatigue; and—as in all things—was seconded by the voice of Estelle. They bade adieu to the assembled company, and were soon returning to their home.

Lord Chauncy's plea of fatigue was a truthful one; and, not long after reaching his house, he sought his couch to sleep. The dark occurrence of the night previous did not interfere with his rest.

The building was, in a short time, still as a tomb.

The hours slowly counted by. It was eleven. Then the door of Estelle Berkeley's boudoir might have been seen to open, and she, herself, issued noiselessly forth.

She was dressed in a complete traveling-suit, and carried a long, waxen candle, which she waved before and around her as she advanced along the hall.

Anon she paused, and listened intently, as though in fear of some one lurking near to spy upon her movements. But no suspicious sound was audible in the household surrounding, and again she started forward on tip-toe, clutching the burnished holder with a firm, hard grip.

The library door was reached.

"Now to secure the will."

She disappeared within, closing the door after her.

It was a long while ere she came out; and when she did come, she carried a large, significant document. It was Lord Chauncy's will.

She did not retrace her steps in the direction of her rooms, but turned to the broad stairway and began to descend.

Suddenly she paused, as suddenly the light fell from her hand and was extinguished; for something struck upon her ears that made her tremble, guiltily.

"Murder! Help!—help here! Murder!" rung, echoing, through the house.

It was the voice of Lord Chauncy's valet. The alarm came from that portion of the building where the nobleman slept; the words—terrible in import—roused the slumbering servants with a start of terror.

Where all was still and deserted was now life, noise and excitement. Lights flashed from room to room; men and women hurried forward to their employers' apartments, where the valet, on his knees, beside a bed, was weeping and moaning and wringing his hands in grief.

Lord Chauncy lay stark and stiff—to all appearances, a corpse. A thin, bluish line around his throat told the tale. He had been strangled!

And out upon the street a close carriage was speeding swiftly away.

Estelle Berkeley sat, like a statue, amid the deep cushions of the vehicle, her hands clenched together, and teeth hard set—the sounds of alarm seeming to follow her, as she was borne onward, at terrific rate, to catch the midnight train for Liverpool.

CHAPTER VI.

PEARL'S TRUE FRIEND.

PEARL was alone in the parlor—a statue of beauty clothed in tears.

Poor child! It was hard for her to realize the unexpected news; and when, gradually, the full force of her grief asserted itself, it was to overwhelm her in a way words cannot express.

A hallowed air seemed to close around her; a silence broken only by a low painful sobbing—which, at last, she could no longer keep back—reigned in the gorgeous salon.

Then, after a long spell of weeping, her wet eyes raised to look at a large painting on the wall. One moment she checked the hot tears, that she might gaze upon the features of one who, she felt, she should see no more; and she sunk to her knees, burying her face in her hands.

"Papa! Papa!" she wailed, tremulously, "Oh! why did you ever go away? Why have you left me all alone? Come back—come back to me!"

"Pearl, my child," spoke a soft voice at her side.

She started, and looked up.

It was her governess who stood there—a young, sad-looking lady, with a calm, sweet expression of countenance, that had, long ago, brought Pearl to love her.

"What is it, Pearl? Tell me."

"Oh, Miss Byrne, I am so sad!—so sad!"

"What has happened?"

"Haven't you heard? Didn't mamma tell you?"

"I have not heard anything."

"Papa!—dear, dear papa!—he—he's dead!" and a fresh burst of tears followed the speech from the quivering lips.

"Your father dead!" exclaimed Miss Byrne, and the accent was low and full of astonishment. "When did he die?"

Pearl had sprung to her feet, and pillowed her head on the other's bosom.

"I don't know; they only told me he was dead. That Mr. Paine told mamma. And, Miss Byrne—oh! Miss Byrne, they are going to send me off to boarding-school! I've got to leave you!"

"Going to send you away? How sudden all this is!" The last was muttered more to herself.

"Yes—yes," sobbed Pearl; "it's sudden, and it's unkind. Mamma is going to California; and now, when I want somebody to talk to, and comfort me, I'll be by myself, among strangers. I wish you could go with me!"

"When are you to leave?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow! I wonder why there is so much haste in getting you off?" The last again to herself.

"I don't know—I don't know. Oh! Miss Byrne, what shall I do?"

Pearl's face, upturned to hers with its page of sorrow, touched a sympathetic chord in the soul of the kind governess, and awoke all the tenderest feelings in her womanly heart. She, too, began to weep, but it was in silence; and folding Pearl closer, she mingled her grief with the child's.

She had learned to love the young girl during the time she had been beneath Mrs. Rochestine's roof; and the affection was mutual. No wonder, then, that both were unhappy at the prospect of being separated; and it doubly argued Pearl's woe, for, with father, mother, kind governess, all gone, and she taken from those scenes so endeared to her youthful fancy, life did, indeed, look desolate and bleak.

"What, what shall I do?" repeated the child, a question that was almost involuntary.

She had always looked to Miss Byrne for advice on those little matters which perplex the young; and it was but natural that she should do so now, upon a subject that was crushing her spirit to the earth.

"Be strong, Pearl," said Miss Byrne, in reply; "be strong as you can. I once lost a father, who, I think, was kind to me as yours was to you. And when he died, I had none to go to, no one to shelter me from the world—for we were poor, and almost friendless. But I knew there was a wise Being in Heaven who had ordained it, and to Him I turned for comfort. God must have given me strength, Pearl; for, whenever I prayed to Him, I felt less sad. And I began to hew out my own life, bearing my cross of trials with humility, and sustained by an unwavering faith in Jesus. Look up to Heaven, Pearl—the only true balm comes from there!"

In one accord, they sunk down to their knees. And there, in the midst of luxury and pompous display—where it sounded strangely solemn to hear a voice in prayer—Pearl's truest earthly friend prayed to their invisible Mediator—and to God!

A beautiful tableau! A picture as rare, in the palaces of the rich, as splendor is in chaos!

It was not long. But, for many seconds after the last whispering word was spoken, they remained motionless—as if a gentle influence from the skies was already pouring into their hearts.

The rustle of a dress recalled them to a sense of their surroundings.

Mrs. Rochestine had entered the parlor, and, as the two arose, she exclaimed:

"Miss Byrne!—you here?"

"Yes. I was seeking Pearl, and found her in such sorrow, that, as a teacher of Truth, as well as other things, I felt it my duty to strive to comfort her."

"You forget; when you came here, I expressly stated that you were not to frequent this portion of the house."

"Nor have I broken the rule, Mrs. Rochestine," returned the governess, quietly; this is the first time, I believe, that I have intruded. I promised to read to your daughter to-day; and it was to keep my promise that I sought her. The servants seemed to have all gone off somewhere—"

"Mamma, don't look so cross!" broke in Pearl, as she clung closer to Miss Byrne.

"Very well—say no more. You may retire now."

"And I am going with her, mamma."

Miss Byrne withdrew in silence, and Pearl accompanied her.

The stepmother gazed after the pair until they disappeared. Then she uttered, half-aloud:

"I don't want to be too severe with the child. She is nothing to me, it is true; yet she never did me harm. And they were praying together? Ah, me! it has been a long time since I prayed; I believe I have almost forgotten how."

With a sigh, she crossed over to close the piano.

The card of her recent would-be visitor lay where she had thrown it.

She picked it up and read the name again.

"PERCY WOLFE." Who can he be?—a perfect stranger."

Miss Byrne was with Pearl constantly during the day; and at night she busied herself with arranging for the child's departure on the morrow.

There were two small trunks to be packed. Pearl carefully discriminated in the selection of their contents, while the governess placed everything nicely to itself.

There was no bustle, excitement, hurrying to and fro, or noisy discussion upon what was most necessary to be taken; all was done in silence, with hardly an occasional whisper of inquiry or answer.

At bedtime the two knelt again. Another prayer went up to Heaven from the stillness of the room where Pearl was to sleep for the last time, and then came the good-night kiss.

The calm, sweet voice of the governess had done much to soothe the aching wound of her charge, and, under the mild influence of her comforters' words, Pearl soon went to sleep.

It was a blessed respite, for the morrow was to bring a renewal of that stern realization of her utter loneliness, which had changed her, from a buoyant, sunny fairy, to a saddened child whose sensibilities were womanly.

CHAPTER VII.

"GOOD-BY!—GOOD-BY!"

PEARL awoke at an early hour next morning.

It was rather a sad beginning for the New Year; and while she dressed for breakfast, she moved mechanically about—scarce daring to glance at her mirror, lest her own expression of face might bring the tears again to her eyes.

She did not descend when her simple toilet was finished. The prayer Miss Byrne had uttered there, the night before, seemed to have left a strange, enticing calm in the atmosphere, imparted a soothing weirdness to her surroundings.

As she sat by her window, and gazed out upon the far hills to the north, with their capping of bare trees that looked so cheerless—with here and there an evergreen that peeped forth as a symbol of life in the midst of winter's deathlike barrenness—there was a great struggle going on in her bleeding heart; a feeling as drear and lone as the picture which met her view was preying on her tender nature.

When the bell rung, she left her room, and started toward the breakfast-hall with a slow step—as unlike the gay, laughing Pearl of twenty-four hours ago as shade is to sunlight.

"Pearl!" called a voice behind her.

Miss Byrne had been standing at the entry window, apparently waiting for her.

"Good-morning, Miss Byrne."

"Did you have a good sleep?" inquired the governess, forcing a smile to wreath her lips, as she stooped to bestow a kiss.

"Yes, I slept very nicely. But I couldn't have done it if it hadn't been for you," said Pearl, as she paused for a moment in the embrace of her friend.

"Keep up a stout heart, my child. All is for the best."

Isabel Rochestine swept past them before they could say more.

"Good-morning, Miss Byrne."

"Good-morning, Mrs. Rochestine."

"I would like to see you," Isabel continued.

"in half an hour, in the parlor. Come, Pearl, breakfast is ready."

Miss Byrne bowed as Isabel passed her, and Pearl followed after her stepmother.

The news of the death of Horace Rochestine had been imparted to the servants. Several among them were of old connection with the house—slaves who, when the proclamation of emancipation was promulgated, had preferred rather to stay with an indulgent master than to seek situations elsewhere.

The gloom was generally felt; and the dark-skinned waiter who was in attendance at table already wore a complete suit of black, and moved about with an air of extraordinary gravity.

"Where am I going to, mamma?" asked Pearl, after nearly the whole meal was partaken of in silence.

"I really cannot say, pet; Mr. Paine has kindly offered to arrange everything."

"And didn't he tell you?"

"No."

Another silence. Both were occupied with thoughts of their own.

"Mamma"—at length, "can't Miss Byrne go with me?"

"Go with you! Why, Pearl, how ridiculous!"

"I don't think it's ridiculous, mamma. I love Miss Byrne dearly, and it would almost break my heart to part with her."

"How absurd! No, pet—they have teachers enough where you will go. Miss Byrne is going to leave me this afternoon."

"Are you going to discharge her?"

"Certainly. I have no use for her after you are gone."

"And she can't go with me?"

"Of course not!"

It seemed to Pearl that everything was against her; at every turn there was something to increase her sadness.

Once she wished that the New Year had never come—or that she had died before its advent. But this feeling was quickly overcome; she remembered the words of the governess, and she resolved to imitate her, to bear her cross of trials with humility.

After breakfast, Pearl retired to her room.

She sat down again by the window. But it was not to contemplate all that looked so desolate without; a new train of thoughts had taken possession of her—thoughts wholly of her father.

She was reviewing those days, not so far in the past, when that kind father was with her, to contribute to her pleasure, or see, in person, that his child was enabled to appreciate the value of studies destined to refine, without wearying the intellect, and fit her for mingling in that society where she belonged.

It was a bright dream to look back upon, and contrasted, mockingly, with her present situation.

She recalled his fond caresses, his encouraging smiles, his concessions to her childish humors, his promises of a brilliant future in store for her—all this flitted like a panorama, in her reveries; and when she ended with asking herself if she had done anything in return for his care, she answered the question, half aloud:

"I am sure I've been a good girl! I never gave him cause to scold me; I never disobeyed him; I always tried my best to please him. If he can look down from Heaven and see me, I know he must weep for me. And papa is in heaven—for he was very, very good!" Then the fair head drooped forward, and the speech was finished with words she could not withhold.

"I wish I was with him!"—a low, whispering utterance that melted from her lips in a long, deep sigh.

Some one tapped at the door.

"Come in."

It was the governess. Pearl ran to meet her.

"Oh, Miss Byrne!—I have more bad news; I asked mamma to let you go with me to boarding-school, and she refused."

"Did you learn where it is they are going to send you?"

"No. Mr. Paine is going to fix it all; and he didn't tell mamma what his plans were."

"And I have some bad news, too, Pearl," said Miss Byrne, smiling faintly.

"What is it? I don't want you to be unhappy," inquired and said the child.

"It is bad for me. I have to look up another situation now."

"Has mamma discharged you?"

"Yes."

"She told me she was going to do it. I'm sorry." Pearl spoke low, and nestled closer to the governess.

"Come," said Miss Byrne, softly, "there are only a few hours left, and I want to give you all the courage I can. I cannot let you go until I feel that I have done you some good; for I love you, Pearl, as much as if you were my own dear little sister. Sit down by me."

"You don't know how much I love you, Miss Byrne!"

They sat there a long while, talking lowly together—the hours went by unheeded, and the sun passed its meridian. Even the lunch-bell did not disturb them, so happy was this commune of sympathetic spirits.

It was when the afternoon had well advanced, that a knock at the door aroused them.

"Mrs. Rochestine says for Miss Pearl to get ready right away. The carriage is waiting for her."

"Be a strong little woman, Pearl," said the governess, after the servant had reluctantly delivered his message and was gone. "If you can conquer your sorrow now, it will not be so hard after a while."

And Pearl set her white teeth firmly together as she proceeded to dress for her departure.

Down-stairs Isabel Rochestine was seated with her lover, Claude Paine, on one of the luxurious sofas. He had come in only a few minutes before, and, at his request, the message was sent up to Pearl, to prepare without delay.

"Where are you going to take her to, Claude?"

"To Ingleside—a charming place, where every attention will be paid her, and where with so many girls of her own age, she cannot fail to find pleasant companions."

"But where is it?"

"About six miles from Baltimore."

Then their conversation turned upon their own future. Each had much to say to the other; there was much to be planned out; and while the moments passed rapidly, they made good use of the opportunity.

They were interrupted by the entrance of Miss Byrne, with Pearl close beside her.

"Ah!" exclaimed Paine, arising, "are you ready?"

"Yes, she is ready," replied the governess.

Paine's eyes were at first fixed upon the child. But they turned quickly upon the speaker.

He started slightly; then gazed steadfast at her, and uttered something inaudible.

She returned his glance with a look equally as hard and steady, while the slightest of frowns contracted her brows.

Isabel did not notice what was going on; she was busy with Pearl, adjusting a careless ribbon and asking the child if she was prepared to say good-by, and obey mamma like a good girl.

Paine advanced to the side of the governess, still regarding her with deepest scrutiny.

"We have met before!" he whispered.

"Yes, Claude Paine, we have met before—and may meet again," she answered, in a tone as low as his, and full of ice.

One second he stood still; then he impatiently wheeled around.

"Is Pearl ready?"

"Yes," said Pearl, quietly; but, in the same breath, she sprang toward Miss Byrne, with a low, pained cry—to be caught in those sheltering arms, to receive the last warm kiss of a friend she thought she was about to lose forever.

When they reached the hall, the final, touching scene was enacted.

Two or three of the old, tried servitors were gathered there, watching for her, to bid farewell to one whom they almost worshiped.

"Good-by, Missy Pearl!"

"God bless you, child!—good-by!"

"Good-by!—good-by!" wept Pearl, as she shook hands with them; and they, devoted beings, cried like children as she was led away from them.

It was soon over. She was gone. She waved her handkerchief to them till the house was lost to view, and then sunk back on the seat of the carriage, to cry bitterly.

"Mrs. Rochestine!" exclaimed the governess, when the door was closed, "you have forgotten her trunks!"

"No, I have not. They are to be sent to her in a day or two. And, Miss Byrne, let me say, the sooner your own trunk is packed the better I shall be pleased. I will pay you an extra month's salary, in order that you may not be inconvenienced, pecuniarily, while seeking a new home."

Miss Byrne gazed after her, as she re-entered the parlor, and said to herself:

"I see how it is with you, Isabel Rochestine—I know why the death of Horace Rochestine does not weigh you down with grief. It is because you love Claude Paine—because he loves you, and has told you so. But, oh! you will

learn your error when it is too late, too late to escape the fate you are weaving for yourself. If you knew Claude Paine as I know him! you would shudder in spite of your blind love for him!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A VISIT OF INQUIRY.

ISABEL ROCHESTINE was not unaware of the fact that Miss Byrne was looking after her.

She discovered it by one quick, momentary glance back toward the vestibule as she entered the parlor.

"Why is it this woman's presence is so distasteful to me?" she asked herself, pausing, thoughtfully, near the center of the room. "What makes her look at me so hard, with those large, gray eyes? Whenever we meet it is the same look—deep and mysterious, until, sometimes, I almost think she is a mesmerizer, or something of the kind!"—she was interrupted by a ring at the door-bell—a loud, determined ring, as if the comer was one of authority, and not to be refused admittance. "Who can it be?"

A card was brought her by one of the servants. It bore the same name as that which had caused the wonderment on the day previous.

"PERCY WOLFE." Strange; what can he want? He is certainly persistent. Admit him! the last to the man who waited.

In a few moments Herod Dean's friend, Percy Wolfe, was ushered into her presence.

He bowed low before the queenly beauty.

"Mrs. Rochestine."

She inclined her head; then said:

"I believe you called to see me yesterday, Mr. Wolfe? Will you be seated?"

When he had drawn up a chair, and she sunk back upon one of the rich sofas, he said:

"No doubt you are somewhat surprised at my visit—I being an entire stranger."

Another bow of the regal head; but she merely listened.

"I come from England."

"England?"—she was instantly attentive.

"Yes."

"What part?"

"London."

"Indeed?"

"And, during my sojourn there, I enjoyed the friendship and confidence of Horace Rochestine."

"I am always pleased to meet my husband's friends. Have you been long in this country?"

"Not long."

"Perhaps you bring me news of him—of Mr. Rochestine?"

"Yes, madam, I—a—" he hesitated.

"I have heard of his death," she said, relieving him.

"Yes?"

"It was some months ago, was it not!—of fever?"

"It was—both," he replied; adding, mentally: "Then this friend, Paine, has carried out Horace's instructions."

"Very sad intelligence to me, Mr. Wolfe; for I cannot but realize that while I was enjoying all the pleasures of society, he—he was—no more."

"Let me couple my sympathy with that of others, Mrs. Rochestine," and, after a pause, he went on:

"But the chief object of my visit was to speak to you regarding the will."

"The will?" in surprise.

"Yes—Mr. Rochestine's will."

"Why—I know nothing about his will! Did he send it by you?"

He stared at her blankly.

"Mrs. Rochestine—"

"Please explain, Mr. Wolfe."

"Is it possibly that his will has not yet reached you?"

"You astonish me! I have seen no will. I did not know he had made any."

Young Wolfe was thinking very deeply, while he looked her steadily in the face.

"Mrs. Rochestine, the last hour of my friend's life were spent with me. Ere he died he told me he had made out a will, in which a child of his, named Pearl, was to receive the bulk of all he possessed in America. And you are ignorant of this?"

"Utterly."

"He said that will had been forwarded to America, and placed in the hands of a responsible party, who would see that the child received its benefits."

"This is all new to me, all very strange!" commented Isabel, in unaffected astonishment.

Deeper grew the studying glance of Percy Wolfe, deeper grew his inward thoughts. He

was a shrewd, suspicious man, and, in his nature, instantly experienced the feeling that all was not right.

Herod Dean—or, rather, Horace Rochestine—had told him, in conversation held on the night preceding the duel, that the will was inclosed with the letter he had sent to his American friend, Claude Paine.

If Claude Paine had followed out the instructions of the letter, so far as to inform the wife that her husband had died, months ago, of fever contracted in London, then why had he not also delivered the will over to Mrs. Rochestine? Thus Percy Wolfe interrogated himself, during the mutual silence which ensued.

"Oh, well, madam, I presume it is all right," he said, at last, speaking the exact opposite of his feelings. "The will is safe, no doubt, and you will get it shortly."

"I hope so. Do you know the person's name, to whom my husband intrusted it?"

"No," he answered promptly—the answer of a man whose suspicions were aroused, and who, under this feeling, felt himself justified in the evasion.

"Where is this child—Pearl—if I may ask?"

"I have just sent her to boarding-school."

"Indeed? When?"

"Only a few minutes ago. As you came in so soon after her going you must have seen the carriage depart."

"And where did you send her?—pardon, if I assume too much."

"To Ingleside. Near Baltimore."

"Ah?"

"Have you ever heard of it?"

"Oh, frequently."

"I understand there is no better institution in the country for the mental, moral and physical training of girls."

"A most excellent place," he acquiesced.

Then he adroitly led her off into a conversation upon trivial matters, until under the influence of his lively manner, engaging speech, and glowing descriptions that are ever ready at the tongue's end of one who has toured through Europe, she forgot, for the time, what had been said regarding Horace Rochestine's will.

It was not until Wolfe had bid her good-day, and she was once more alone, that the object of his visit flashed back into her mind; and as she returned from the door of the parlor, she halted abruptly, with the exclamation:

"Am I dreaming? What was it he said about Horace's will? That the bulk was to go to Pearl? I am, then, only to receive the widow's portion! But where is this will? It is all very mysterious. I wish I had had my senses about me, and learned more from him!—well, Miss Byrne?"

The governess had entered almost noiselessly, and Isabel started at the sudden intrusion.

"I have come to say that my trunk is packed, Mrs. Rochestine."

"What! Why, I really did not mean that you should go as soon as this."

"Further," continued Miss Byrne, without noticing the interruption, "you promised me an extra month's salary. I regret that I must ask you to fulfill that promise, but—"

"Yes—yes; wait a moment."

Isabel advanced to a writing-desk, on a small table that stood in one corner, and hurriedly wrote off a check for fifty dollars.

This she handed to the governess, saying:

"You have been very attentive to Pearl, Miss Byrne. I know she has improved wonderfully under your instructions. In procuring another situation, you may refer to me, if you desire."

"Thank you. Where shall I say you may be found?" The question was put in a meaning tone, and the large gray eyes watched her keenly.

Isabel bit her lip.

"Well—really—I—in fact, Miss Byrne, I had not thought. I may be a long way from here when you get another position. I will write you a recommendation," and she turned again to the desk.

"No—do not trouble yourself, Mrs. Rochestine: it is unnecessary. I am well recommended by letters I already possess. I bid you farewell—I think I hear the carriage at the door."

"Stay, Miss Byrne. I would do more for you. Perhaps you have not saved much money while here. Shall I write a check for another fifty? I—have you made up your mind where you are going?"

Isabel scarce knew why she put this question. Perhaps it was a fate which prompted her to it, that Miss Byrne might make the significant reply she did.

"I am going, first, to Ingleside, Mrs. Rochestine—to see if Pearl is comfortable."

She was gone.

The dull sound of the carriage-wheels came to Isabel's ears, as she stood there, with newly-perplexing thoughts tangling in her mind.

"To Ingleside?—to see if Pearl is comfortable? What can she mean?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLAN WORKING.

THE carriage containing Claude Paine and his young companion sped onward at a rapid rate, for there was no time for delay.

Pearl could not check the tears of her more than grief; her feelings, at this prospect of exile, were such that her nature could not then overcome them.

He watched her for some time, listening to the sobs.

"Don't cry so, little Pearl," he said, at last, in a voice meant to soothe her.

"I can't help it, Mr. Paine!—oh! indeed I can't!"

"You must think of what a nice time you will have at school. There will be girls of your own age, who will love you; there will be all kinds of recreation to make your studies light. There is a gymnasium; a beautiful lawn; flowers; fresh air—why, you will soon be happy under the influence that will surround you. You will, besides, get a thorough education, and, in the end, thank mamma Rochestine for sending you—"

"I don't care for all these things!" she broke in, half-impatiently, as she wept on.

"Don't care for them! Why, Pearl, do you not wish to be perfect in your studies?"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Paine, I do. But—" and the tear-wet eyes raised quickly to his face, "what is all this compared to what I am losing? I've lost a father—nothing can make up for that! And then, all the dear nooks and corners in our old house—I shall never see them again!—I feel I sha'n't! As for flowers—why, one little bud out of my own garden, when everything looks so pretty in bloom, is worth more to me than all the roses in the world! I want to be an educated woman, Mr. Paine, and maybe I will be; but, oh! see what it is going to cost—not in money: I am miserable!"

He did not interrupt the child: her speech was so strong, so passionate, so unlike what he might expect from one so young, that it held him till she had finished.

"But, Pearl, you will have such a great variety of interesting objects around you—"

"Then they will be all the harder to choose from!" sobbed the voice in the handkerchief.

"But, so many nice companions—"

"I don't want them. I only want one good friend, and I would rather have Miss Byrne than all the others you talk of."

At mention of the governess's name he started. It reminded him of the brief scene in the parlor.

There was, evidently, an old acquaintance existing between Claude Paine and Pearl's friend, and that it was significant the reader has, no doubt, inferred.

The young girl's last words had thrown him into a state of meditation; and the thoughts that began chasing through his mind could not have been very pleasant, for, as he sat silent, his gaze riveted on the floor of the carriage, he was frowning.

When he shook off the moody feeling that had come upon him, Pearl had ceased crying.

She was looking out through the window at the houses they were passing by so quickly; but her gaze was vacant, it did not note what she saw.

She was in that peculiar frame, for which it is hard to find a name—thoughtful, yet upon nothing; sad, yet scarce aware of it; oblivious, almost, to her own presence, yet, to an observer, reflecting deeply, and fully awake.

Silence prevailed during the rest of the drive. They soon reached the depot.

"Come, Pearl."

She roused, with a half-frightened start, at sound of his voice.

"Are we there?"

"Yes."

He assisted her out, and they entered the building.

Almost immediately his alert eyes discovered a negress standing near the door of the ladies' waiting-room.

As they approached her, he said, inquiringly:

"Cassa?"

"I's here," answered the negress.

Turning to Pearl, he said:

"Here is the woman who will take you, Pearl."

"Take me?" she exclaimed, surprisingly.

"Yes. She will take you to Ingleside—to school."

"Why, I thought you were going with me, Mr. Paine?"

"Oh, no; that is impossible—"

"Does mamma know this?"

"Certainly—"

"It's queer she didn't tell me!"

"Perhaps she forgot it—or hardly thought it necessary. But stop a moment, while I get your tickets," and he turned away as he spoke. Pearl gazed after him.

"Didn't he tell you I's goin' to take you 'long?" asked Cassa.

"No," still looking, incredulously, toward Claude Paine, who was purchasing the tickets at the window.

Suddenly Pearl bent a close scrutiny on the woman who was soon to be her companion.

Cassa's face was as if cut from wood; nothing there to intimidate the child, nothing suspicious, yet nothing to make her presence agreeable—simply a black, immobile face, with a pair of eyes that betrayed naught of their owner.

"Where are my trunks?" interrogated Pearl.

"Done gone in by dis time, guess."

"When are we going to Ingleside?—to-night?" questioned the young girl again, after a pause.

"Be dark when we gets to Baltimo'," replied Cassa; "so 't we can't go out dar till mornin'."

Paine just then rejoined them. He had not been absent long.

Pearl would have asked more questions but for the interruption; and Cassa was already a little uneasy in answering the child.

"Now, Pearl, be a good, stout-hearted girl. We shall expect a long letter from you soon, telling us what a nice time you are having"—handing the tickets to Cassa while speaking.

"Have my trunks come in, Mr. Paine?"

She had not noticed that the trunks were not on the carriage.

"You will find them at Ingleside when you get there," he evaded, adding: "Here is something from mamma."

It was a new portemonnaie of rich material, and Pearl put it carefully away in her pocket.

"Don't open it until you get on the road," he said, forcing a mysterious smile. "There's quite a surprise in it for you. And remember this: on one side you'll find something rolled up, and marked with an X—that's for Cassa here," nodding toward the negress, and, at the same time, giving her a significant glance.

"I'll remember, Mr. Paine."

"And now let me see you to your seat, all safe. The train will start presently."

As they moved toward the gate, Paine found an opportunity to lean over and kiss into Cassa's ear:

"Mark, now: see that she does not escape you! Keep her safe out of my way, as long as you do, you shall have plenty of money."

She answered merely by a knowing look, and they hurried on.

They were hardly seated when the go-bell sounded.

Paine, bidding Pearl adieu, took his departure. He did not leave the depot, however, till he saw the rumbling train far out on the curving track: and then, with a clenched fist, and a dark gleam in his eyes, he hastened out to the waiting carriage.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he chuckled, as he was borne away, "now the plot works! If Cassa serves me as she has promised, all is well. I am in the full tide of success. Isabel is mine—and so will be the wealth of Horace Rochestine ere long. The only obstacle in my path is removed for the present; and for the future, if need be, I can plot anew. Dorsey Derrick, we are two fortunate men. You shall come in for a good share of the spoils. Ha! ha! ha!"

CHAPTER X.

A MIND IN A MAZE.

WHEN Percy Wolfe whispered in the ear of his unlucky friend, on the night of the duel, the promise to find the child, and see that she obtained the benefits of her father's will, the utterance was an oath, as it were, so sincere was the heart from which it welled.

The young man had even neglected other pressing duties, after his arrival in New York, in order to make his conscience clear on the subject of his pledge.

During the voyage across the Atlantic, he had given many moments to picturings of a bright little spot in the West—a cottage, where in summer time he had passed so many happy hours in the cool shade of oaks and maples, communing with Nature; a father and mother whom he had not seen for years; two sisters, one scarce free from the nurse's arms—the other a child of beauty, with a disposition ever ready to sacrifice her own desires for those of others.

a nature as sweet and mild as ever swayed the actions of a human.

He often wondered if the old charms were waiting to welcome him—then trembled while he thought, for two long years had rolled around since he last had heard from "home."

Fifteen years ago he had started out to make himself a man among men; and Fortune had not shut her portals to his energy for he had prospered.

In the time gone, what had transpired round his birthplace? Of father, mother, sisters—how many were left? Why had letter after letter, which he sent brought no reply, no tidings of any kind to relieve him of his suspense?

With such feelings consuming him, it was but natural that his whole soul should be tortured with yearning to once more stand amid the scenes of his childhood, and rest in the embrace of those precious ones who, alone, of all man's friends, love with an unwavering affection—father, mother, sister!

But the promise he had given Horace Rochestine, in that fatal hour of the past, must be fulfilled first.

He went straightway to Washington, and, as we have seen, called at the house of deceased.

And when Percy Wolfe left the presence of Isabel Rochestine, it was with the firm conviction that Horace Rochestine's friend, Claude Paine, needed looking after.

Wolfe had been made aware of his friend's desire to be considered dead by those who knew him in America; knew that Claude Paine had received instructions to that effect; and, in his conversation with Isabel, had discovered that this much had been attended to.

But he knew, also, that the will for Pearl's benefit was inclosed in with the letter to Paine. Then, why had it not come to light?

When he reached his room at the National Hotel, he threw himself into a chair, and looked thoughtfully down at the carpet.

"There's some mystery here," he mused, in an under tone. "Either this Claude Paine is a rascal, or else I am too hasty in forming my opinions. 'Hasty' and his brow knit. 'No, I am not too hasty; Paine must have got the letter and the will some time ago; and he has had ample opportunity to do the right thing. I wonder if Mrs. Rochestine was only 'acting,' when she professed ignorance? What if she is in league to rob the child? Let me think: what is to be done?"

When he sat there, meditating deeply, numerous footsteps sounded in the entry.

Some one was about to occupy the next room. "What time shall I knock?" inquired some one ruffly, outside.

"Call me in time for the 12:45 train to Baltimore," answered a low pleasant voice. "I will breakfast in my room," and the door closed as the waiter withdrew.

Percy Wolfe did not notice what was transpiring; he was too much absorbed with the perplexity occasioned by his visit to Isabel Rochestine. Had he but caught the servitor's questions and the answer of the female, he would have been saved much uneasiness, anxiety and trouble that was in store for him.

Arousing at last from his unsatisfactory state he went out again, and sought the theater, as a possible relief of his over-tried brain.

But when he retired, at a late hour, the same strain of thoughts came back upon him.

He began to feel that some strong, inexplicable influence was chaining him to this one thing. It seemed to him he must dwell solely on the fact of Claude Paine holding back the will; and not once, or twice, nor thrice, but a dozen times he asked himself the questions:

"Can it be Mrs. Rochestine would rob the child? Is Claude Paine a villain? How am I to untangle it all?" and after a while, he would half answer:

"I will see this Claude Paine. Let him explain to me. By Heaven! if there is an evil plot afoot, I will prove its ruin, as sure as there is a just God!"

In the darkness of the room, he lay with his eyes open, staring upward, till his mind became so wrought upon that sleep was impossible.

In vain he closed his eyelids—they would start open again, and his lips would utter, in spite of him:

"I shall see Mrs. Rochestine again, to-morrow. She can tell me where to find this Paine. Yes; there's something wrong—there must be. I—" He stopped short, with a half-choking exclamation.

The sound of a woman's voice had interrupted him.

Between the two apartments was a door. It was closed and locked, but in the solemn stillness, he heard words of prayer.

The accents were so earnest, the tone so tremulous, that instantly he became riveted.

The new occupant of the adjoining room was praying for some one—not for herself, as he quickly discovered, and involuntarily he listened.

Soon the speaker ceased, and the struggling light that shone at the cracks of the door, vanished.

He was slowly gliding back to the subject of his unrest, when again he heard the tremulous voice in the next room.

"Poor—poor little Pearl! Ah, how unhappy you must be, so far away from every one to love you. But I will see you once more, Pearl, before I am compelled to say good-by forever."

Percy Wolfe sat upright in bed, and a nervous sensation darted through him.

Sleep for that night was now out of the question. He had heard enough to doubly augment the turbulent condition of his faculties.

He arose, lighted the gas, and filling his meerschaum pipe, walked rapidly to and fro, with the tobacco smoke curling in thick clouds around him, as he puffed at a furious rate.

"Pearl! Pearl!" he muttered, between whiffs. "I wonder if the Pearl she means is the Pearl I am after? Singular—singular—singular; I'm afraid I won't get home at all, if I don't make haste and bring this to a— Now, I wonder if that party has gone to bed in there?"

He paused and listened.

All was still in the room adjoining.

"Yes, she's gone to bed, I guess"—resuming his striding; "I'll see her in the morning, though. Not a clew must be lost—not one. What's the matter with Pearl? If her Pearl is my Pearl! then why is she 'poor little Pearl,' eh? But, I'll see her in the morning. I'll see Mrs. Rochestine, too. I'll see Paine—I'll see everybody! Confound my nervousness!"

He refilled the pipe several times, and smoked and smoked till the bowl burnt his fingers, and his tongue was sore.

But sleep conquered, finally. He never knew how it happened, but when the hands of the clock were indicating the hour of two, he sat upon the sofa, sound asleep, with a confused jumble of incomprehensible matter, flitting and vortexing in his dreams—causing his hands to twitch in slumber, and his lips to utter unintelligible somethings.

It was an unlucky sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

PAINE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

CLAUDE PAINE was in excellent spirits when he arrived at his rooms on E street, after returning from the depot.

He dispatched the small colored boy of the house to the restaurant at the corner, to procure a bottle of wine; and, sitting before the warm stove, with limbs elevated to a triangular horizontal on a convenient chair, he sipped the sparkling contents of his glass; smiled jubilantly, and finally broke forth:

"Drink and smile, and learn to think That we were born to smile and drink."

—Ha! ha! ha! Yes—yes, the plots work well. The child is out of my way; Isabel Rochestine will be mine as soon as I can persuade her to throw aside the infernal 'black.' That will now—ah! here it is"—drawing a long, thin document from his pocket, and setting the wine glass on the table—"now, I wonder if it is safe for me to be carrying such a thing? In my trunk would be better—a deal better. What if I destroy it?—make an end of it at once? Would that not be safest of all?"

He turned the MS. over and over in his hands, as if trying to decide what course he should adopt concerning it.

While thus engaged, footsteps sounded in the hall without. Some one was approaching his room.

"It's Derrick," he said to himself, looking up.

The corner was his intimate friend, Dorsey Derrick. He entered without knocking.

"Well, Dorsey?"

"What luck?" interrogated Derrick, casting his hat aside, turning on more gaslight, and then drawing up a chair.

"Best in the world—"

"Everything work off smooth?"

"Couldn't be better. Cassa was on hand; I purchased their tickets for New York—the child will be asleep by the time they reach Baltimore; and if she is not, it will make no matter, as she has never been out of Washington, and will hardly know the difference. So, you see, my road is clear. Everything goes well. Isabel Rochestine—"

"Never mind her, just now; you're all right in that direction, too. I want some money."

"You shall have it. How much?"

"A hundred."

Paine went to his trunk, and counted out a hundred dollars. Giving it to the other he resumed his seat with:

"What's the matter? You look as sour as old milk."

"I feel better, now, tapping the money significantly. Fact is, my funds all run out some time ago. I got in debt. It's a principle of mine never to cheat a man who does me a good turn in a pinch, so I don't want to go away without squaring up; and as you're going to leave—"

"Yes, I shall leave as soon as possible—with Isabel. I gave Cassa an envelope, stamped and directed to a place in Sacramento. Wherever she stops, she'll get somebody to write down her directions, send it to me, and I can supply her with money. For I must keep her well hushed up, Derrick."

"Yes," and after a pause, he continued: "Seems to me I'm going to have rather a bare time of it, following you and her around. Why, I won't hardly see you."

"Yes you will. Just wait till we're married, Derrick, and then for sport—lots of money, and nothing to do!"

"Mighty lucky for us that you chanced afoul of this opportunity. We couldn't have held up much longer on cards—"

"Don't mention it, Derrick. I've sworn never to stake another cent on cards as long as I live."

"So've I."

"Stick to it—yes, help yourself."

"Derrick had discovered the wine, and instantly made a movement toward it."

"What's that?" he inquired, when he resumed his seat, indicating the document which Paine still held in his hand.

"That's the will."

"Rochestine's?"

"Yes."

"Bust her open."

"What?"

"Bust her open," repeated Derrick.

"Why, we never could put it together again! See—it's got Rochestine's seal on it."

"Let me have it. I'm curious to see what the thing says—"

"You'll spoil it."

"No, I won't." Derrick took out his pen-knife.

The fire in the stove was roaring; the urn on top, half full of water, was steaming. He held the large envelope over the latter, while Paine watched him in silence.

In a few minutes he inserted the blade of the knife at one corner, and began opening the envelope with ease. But the sealing-wax would not yield. He cut close and carefully around this, and—the will was before them.

"You've ruined it!"

"No, I haven't. When we fix it up again, we can paste the outside onto the inside. There'll be some trouble when they open it, that's all—why, I thought you didn't want anybody to see it?" the last suddenly.

"Neither do I; but—here, what's this? By Jove! he has inclosed a letter to his wife."

There was a small envelope, directed to Mrs. Horace Rochestine.

Paine immediately appropriated this, while Derrick settled himself back in his chair to read the will.

The letter purported to have been written by Horace Rochestine, with the last efforts of his expiring strength—was full of endearing words, unsteadily traced; said that the writer knew he had not many moments to live, etc., etc.

Paine smiled as he glanced over the lines, and muttered:

"The infernal hypocrite! And he is now, no doubt, as lively as I am!"

But suddenly he came to a paragraph which checked him, held him, caused him to start and pale.

Simultaneously there came an exclamation from Dorsey Derrick. He, too, had made a discovery of some kind.

"What's up, Paine? Found anything?"

"Found anything? Well, I should think I had—"

"So've I—"

"Listen to this," continued Paine, interrupting him. "Here's trouble in prospect," and he read aloud as follows from the letter that was now being crunched in his hold:

"* * * * * In this will, dear wife, I have given nearly all to Pearl. You will have enough—your own possessions, and your portion from this, are ample. A very dear friend of mine, Percy Wolfe by name, intends returning to America, his native home, in a short time. I will acquaint him with what I have

done; and, though I have every confidence in Claude Paine, Mr. Wolfe will ask after Pearl, and how she enjoys her wealth."

There was much more, such as a dying man would write with his feeble abilities; but Claude Paine went no further.

He tore the letter into a hundred pieces, sprung forward, and grasped his companion roughly by the wrist.

"Derrick!"

"Well, I don't see anything so extraordinary in that."

"You don't! Then you lack brain. This man has reached America—is now, this very hour, in Washington—"

"How do you know?"

"Because he called yesterday to see Isabel Rochestine! I saw his card. This won't do—never!"

He snatched up his hat and coat, and strode to the door.

"Hold on, now—" began Derrick.

But Claude Paine was gone. He was keenly alive to the danger that menaced him, in the presence of Percy Wolfe.

Whether Horace Rochestine was dead or not, made no difference. He had made Wolfe acquainted with the substance of his will—his visit to the house of Mrs. Rochestine satisfied Paine of that—and the latter's plans were liable to overthrow, at any moment, unless he took immediate steps to elude the man who, he judged by his fortunate discovery in the letter, was on his track.

He hurried down Seventh street to Pennsylvania avenue. Securing one of the cabs that stood in front of the Reservation, he gave the driver his directions, and was soon speeding toward the house of Isabel Rochestine.

And during the ride, his fertile brain was hard at work for the object of his visit was to persuade Isabel to depart with him, at once, and at every sacrifice.

Only one thought, one intent, was uppermost in his excited mind, and that was, to escape from Percy Wolfe!

After the departure of his associate, Dorsey Derrick reassumed his comfortable position in the chair, and vented an illudic grunt.

"He's wild!" he exclaimed, as he ran his eyes again over the will; and, after a while, he went on, in a musing strain:

"Now, the question is: shall I let him know what this important document says? He's to get ten thousand dollars, eh? for carrying out Horace Rochestine's instructions. If he marries Isabel Rochestine, he'll get about two hundred and fifty thousand, in all—provided that the child, Pearl, doesn't put in an appearance. But he might take it into his head to act honest and be satisfied with ten? What's ten thousand dollars among one—much less two! And then I wouldn't get so much, either. I guess you'd better be kept in ignorance, friend Paine. You marry the widow, by all means. I'm partial to widows, I am!"

CHAPTER XII.

OFF ON THE MORROW.

ISABEL ROCHESTINE was seated before the glowing fireplace, in the gorgeous parlor of her home—her attitude one of captivating grace, her appearance that of a lovely, almost unearthly being, absorbed in random reverie, unconscious of all around her—the dart of Cupid pinning in her heart a mystic fire, and weaving heavens of delight within her waking dream.

One elbow rested on the arm of the rich chair; one hand—now stripped of its flashing jewels—pressed against her crimsoned cheek; and her eyes—those large, lustrous orbs of jet—gazed dreamily into the mass of coals.

She was attired in plain black, devoid of every ornament; yet even in this, when nothing but simplicity engaged the eye, there were new charms to be discovered by the betrayals of the close-falling dress, in the white neck that outlined so gracefully above the sable circle at the throat, in the pure arm, half-exposed by the "angel" sleeve, as it supported her beautiful head.

A strange calm pervaded the atmosphere of the house.

There was no blaze of light, such as had, heretofore, made Mrs. Rochestine's house prominent in that locality during the winter; but a dim, uncertain glimmer here and there, or a solemnly-flickering flame in the large kitchen, where the servants, even more susceptible to the gloom of the hour than she who was alone up-stairs, were grouped together and speaking only in an undertone.

Presently there was a dull rumble of carriage-wheels on the outside; a vehicle stopped before

the house. Then came a quick, impatient pull at the bell, awakening Isabel from her meditations.

"Why, who can that be?" she asked herself.

"I am expecting no one to-night."

In a few moments, a servant entered.

"Who is it?"

"Mr. Paine, ma'am, is in the other parlor—"

"Mr. Paine!—here? I thou— Admit him," quickly.

Claude Paine was ushered in.

"Claude! I thought you were in Baltimore with Pearl?"

"Isabel!" He had her in his arms ere she could say more, and was raining kisses on her yielding lips.

"I expected to be, Isabel; but, something has occurred to greatly embarrass me. At the depot I met a friend. It seems it was a providential meeting, too; for he had been looking for me here, in vain, and was just about to return to New York, despairing of being able to find me. I am called to Sacramento immediately—"

"Sacramento!"

"Yes—rather strange that I must go so hastily to the very city you intended visiting, isn't it? If I could catch the very next train, it would be none too soon. I can hardly delay an hour. Several thousand dollars are involved—so much, in truth, that I could not afford to be the loser. We can go together—"

"Pearl? What did you do with Pearl?" she asked, breaking in upon his rapid utterances.

"This friend of mine will take her to the Institution. They are long since on their way. He has time, and kindly volunteered the favor. As everything was arranged for her reception beforehand, there will be no difficulty. Now, there is a train going at 6:45 A. M. to-morrow, connecting at the Relay House for the West—"

"Are you sure Pearl will have no trouble?" Isabel interrupted, again.

"Of course I am! Now, can you be ready to go with me on the early train, in the morning?"

"This is sudden, Claude. And the hour is so early! I will scarce have time to—"

"But consider, dearest, how delightful for us to be in each other's company on the trip. Can't you possibly arrange matters?"

"I might," hesitatingly, while she still lingered in the embrace of this man who controlled the very pulsations of her heart.

"Say that you will, Isabel? Even if you have to let one or more of the servants remain in charge of the house until you can come back—"

"That I shall never do, Claude. I hate this section, and shall never return to it."

He did not expect this. But his eyes glistened with a secret satisfaction when he heard it, and he shifted his position in order to conceal, in the movement, the effect her speech had on him.

"Then, discharge all the servants, pack your trunks, close the house—and I will come back at some time and sell the property for you. Decide, Isabel; for I have hardly a moment to spare—even for the blisses I find in your face, form, voice and lips! My carriage is waiting for me at the door, and I must be off."

"I will go, Claude. But I will have to make a good many sacrifices it will be so inconvenient."

"I will try and pay you for the sacrifices, by—"

"I know you will, dear Claude!" and, after a second, she added, inquiringly: "Do you remember there was a gentleman called to see me yesterday, after I ordered the house to be closed?"

"Yes." He looked at her keenly as he answered:

"Well, he came again to-day."

"He did." His teeth clinched, and his fingers worked; but she did not notice that her words had made him suddenly and newly nervous.

"He had a very singular object in calling: said Horace had left a will for Pearl's benefit—it had been intrusted to some party in America. Did you know anything about it?"

"I? Why, no!" His exclamation of surprise was well affected; she failed to see how great an effort it cost him to smother the true feelings of his breast, and check the malediction upon Percy Wolfe, that was at his tongue's end.

"It is very singular," he said. "Have you heard of it before?"

"No."

"Be assured, if there is such a will, it will appear soon—"

"That is precisely what he said."

"Let us quietly await the issue of a prophecy, and meantime, think of other things."

And then, though the carriage waited, though

he had declared the short limit of time at his disposal, he lingered awhile with the woman who was worshipping him with a mad, wild love—whose soft lips would seem so full of sweets that, unless dead to the subtler passions which give to nature its soul, he could not live a moment away from their magnetic pressure—whose arms clung round his neck when, at last, he started to leave, until it would seem impossible to sunder them.

As the carriage rolled away from the house of Isabel Rochestine, bearing Claude Paine back to his rooms on E street, the villain sat upright on his seat, struck his knee a blow with his hard-shut fist, and exclaimed:

"Capital! Capital! None too soon! He is after me!—and will miss me. Hal! hal! hal! Stir yourself, Mr. Percy Wolfe!—for you are hunting a game whose wits have been its sustenance for the last ten years. Beat me if you can!"

But his uneasiness of a short time before had passed away. It was a new excitement that fired him now—a feeling of triumph, in the knowledge that he was about to escape Percy Wolfe; he had allayed any suspicions that might have arisen in Isabel's mind; he would soon defy the pursuit of the man he considered his sworn foe, from that hour; all this tending to the mature development of his plans, and a consummation of his desires.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHY DO THEY WANT PERCY WOLFE?

WE have said that Percy Wolfe's sleep was an unlucky one.

It was broad daylight when he awoke—any thing but early—when, with a jerk and a spring, he started from the lounge, and stood rubbing his unrested eyes.

Such a sleep as his had been was worse than none at all; for he was tired, lazy-like, weak, and suffering with a dull pain in the head, which, now and then, almost made him cross-eyed, and strained the nerves of the tasked orbs, until they seemed ready to break.

Yawning and sour looking, he made a careless toilet; though while engaged at it, he was thinking none the less of the mysterious occupant of the adjoining room, her significant utterances, his resolution to see her and ascertain exactly who she meant when she made use of the name that was just then implicated in the perplexities of his own bewildered mind.

He felt that he was about to tread upon the most delicate limits to propriety, perhaps would meet with a reception which the seeming impudence of his action would merit; but, under the circumstances, he did not hesitate.

He was resolved upon sifting the matter which troubled him, was determined to look after the interests of Pearl Rochestine—the child of his beloved friend who, he shuddered to believe, had long ago been a subject for dissection in some medical institute in London; and, to carry out his resolution, he deemed it necessary to find out whether the party in the next room, in her allusions to "Pearl," meant Pearl Rochestine, and, if so, why Pearl should be an object to pity.

He made a hasty meal at the breakfast table, and returned to his apartment. Then he pulled the bell-rope, and began walking, uneasily, to and fro.

"Come in," he answered to the knock of the servant who attended his summons.

And he added:

"Will you take my card to the lady who occupies the first room to the left of this, on the same side? Tell her I desire an interview. Tell her it is very important. Tell her that much depends on her granting it. There—hurry!"

He handed his card to the man.

But the servant stood still and looked at him.

"Well, what are you staring at? Hurry, I say!"

"Dar ain't nobody in dar, boss."

"What?"

"Nobody dar."

"Nobody there! What do you mean?" beginning to grow excited.

"De young lady's done left."

"Left? Gone? You—"

"Yes, sar; lef' ten minutes ago—while you's at breakfas', I thinks."

Wolfe groaned. The sensation that seized upon him at this announcement is impossible to describe.

For a second he gazed blankly into the ebony countenance before him; then he wheeled around, and strode up and down, while the astonished looker-on wondered what ailed him.

"Waiter!—you may go—stop: tell them to

make out my bill at the office. I'll be down to pay it in five minutes—"

"Yes, sar," slightly partaking of the other's excitement.

"Stop: order me a cab—" grasping him by the arm.

"Yes, sar!" while his short wool actually seemed to untwist and straighten, and the whites of his eyes expanded.

"Stop; then come back and carry down my trunk—"

"Yes, sar!"

"Fly!"

"Yes, sar—I flies!"

The waiter vanished.

Wolfe hastened to pack his trunk, throwing boots, boot-jack, comb and brush, dressing-gown, blacking-box—all these into a confused mass, careless of consequences, meanwhile running his nervous fingers through his hair till each fiber stood distinctly on end.

When the waiter returned, the trunk was ready. Wolfe preceded him, paid his bill at the office, and rushed out to the waiting cab.

To the driver's surprise, he was ordered uptown, instead of to the depot.

Paying the servant who had assisted him, he was soon speeding toward the residence of Mrs. Rochestine.

To his utter astonishment, he found the house closed. Everything about it looked gloomy and deserted.

In vain he pulled the bell, glanced up at the windows, up and down the street, descended the steps, reascended them, rung the bell again—no use: that it was unoccupied he was forced, at last, to realize.

And the driver of the cab, easily perceiving his excitement, was half inclined to consider him a lunatic.

It had been Wolfe's intention to first see Isabel Rochestine, and ascertain the whereabouts of Claude Paine. This settled so that he could find the man, he would next go to see Pearl.

Mrs. Rochestine had told him that Pearl was at Ingleside. He knew the place well—both by letters he had received from friends in America, and by having heard Horace Rochestine mention it as the very place he would have liked to send his child, had he but thought of it before engaging a governess.

Wanting to know if the words uttered by the party who occupied the room next to him at the hotel involved Pearl Rochestine, he would go to Ingleside, and, if their object of interest was identical, he would, perhaps, see her there—for he had heard her say she would see Pearl once more—and might have additional reason for facing Claude Paine, to demand an explanation of the latter's behavior.

But Mrs. Rochestine had disappeared. Claude Paine's directions could not be learned. The quandary was rather overwhelming. There was but one course remaining:

To Ingleside!

He re-entered the vehicle, and ordered the driver straight to the depot, bidding him "go like mad," for he hoped he might catch the noon train.

When he glanced at his watch, though, he gave up this hope.

He did not, however, desire the man to slacken his speed. The sudden disappearance of Isabel Rochestine furnished fresh food for troublesome wonderment, and greatly increased his nervousness. The rattling of the windows, rumble of the wheels, and swaying, jolting motion of the cab, as the horses were urged on at a swift pace, rather enlivened his condition.

Let us state here that the occupant of the room adjoining Percy Wolfe's at the hotel, was no other than Pearl's governess, Miss Byrne.

When she left Mrs. Rochestine's house, she scarce knew where to go for the night, and accepted the first thing which suggested to her mind—to take a room at "The National," and go over to Ingleside on the morrow.

She had purchased a ticket for Baltimore on the 12:45 train, and when Percy Wolfe reached the depot that train had gone.

He must then wait until three o'clock.

And while Wolfe had been riding toward the house of Isabel Rochestine, two men were overhauling the "Book of Arrivals" on the National Hotel counter.

They were sober-looking, muscularly-built, heavily-whiskered men, with keen eyes, observant glance, and business-like appearance. One was short, the other was tall; both were busy reading the names in the list.

"Told you so!" exclaimed one, presently, in a guarded tone.

"Right."

"Here he is. He might have made better use of his week's start of us."

"PERCY WOLFE," read off the taller of the two from the page.

"Shall we come down on him?"

"Right-away!"

The short individual turned to the clerk.

"Will you please have us shown up to No. —?"

The clerk stared a moment.

"There's nobody up there, sir. He's just this minute left, trunks and all."

The two exchanged disappointed glances.

"Perhaps he's gone on the 12:45 train—there's twenty minutes yet to catch it, if it's important, and you know him when you see him?"

"No 'e didn'," said the waiter, who had assisted Percy, who happened, just then, to be near the counter, "I hear 'im tell the drivah to go to No. —, — street, N. W."

Another interchange of looks between the two men. And, evidently, they were accustomed to act upon the mere expression of the eye, for they wheeled simultaneously and hurried out.

Each hailed a cab. The tall man gave his driver the directions he had received from the hotel waiter, and was whirled off.

The short man ordered "To the depot," and offered a five-dollar bill if he could catch the 12:45 train.

But they missed their game.

And, within half an hour, Percy Wolfe was walking the platform, puffing vigorously at his meerschaum, striving to calm himself, and utterly unconscious of the fact, that two men were following his trail for a mysterious purpose.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FIRST SCENT OF DANGER.

WHEN the cars wound out around the broad curve, and the locomotive sounded its loud, hoarse, shrieking whistle, Pearl felt as if she had, indeed, been torn away from everything dear which the earth contained for her.

The child had mastered her emotion so far as to conceal it from those around her—it would not do to cry, when so many pairs of strange eyes were fixed upon her; but the woe, the agony in her heart, was only redoubled by this fearful strain; for when the nature is crushed by sorrow, tears are the dewy liquid that balms the aching wound.

It cost a superhuman effort; but the heavenly blue eyes were clear, and the face, though pale, was even more angelic in its mild, sweet outline of appearance.

Cassa was silent as she. The negress sat next the window, gazing out at the open scene now fast vanishing under the mantle of night; and Pearl was busy trying to read the half-averted, stoic face, and wondering who its owner was.

Cassa had made good use of the funds given her by Claude Paine. She was plainly but substantially dressed, and looked very nice and clean.

When the conductor came along, the tickets passed through Pearl's hands to him.

As she handed them back to Cassa, she gazed at the latter in surprise.

"What's de matter?" demanded Cassa, bluntly, putting the tickets in her pocket.

"Why, those tickets are for New York! I thought we were going to Baltimore?"

"So we is."

"Then what do we want tickets to New York for?"

"Dunno. Guess he don't made mistake."

The young girl thought it strange that Mr. Paine should make such a very great mistake, and she began questioning herself mentally.

"Open de pocket-book," said Cassa, presently.

Thus reminded of what Paine had given her at the depot, Pearl drew forth the portemonnaie and opened it.

It was filled with greenbacks.

The eyes of the negress glistened as she beheld the contents.

"Here's the roll marked with an 'X'," said Pearl, extracting a portion.

"Dat's mine—gimme," exclaimed Cassa, snatching it quickly.

What remained was counted over, and found to amount to fifty dollars, with a few one-dollar bills for convenient change.

"Better lemme keep it," advised Cassa.

"You?"

"Yes. Keep it safe for you, honey."

"Why, don't you suppose I know how to take care of money? I sha'n't do any thing of the kind," and she added, as she restored the portemonnaie to her pocket: "I don't know you, except that Mr. Paine said that you would take me to Ingleside. And if we are going out there in the morning, I guess no one will rob me between now and then."

Cassa said no more. The whole of the remaining journey was gone over in silence.

As Paine had promised himself, Pearl went to sleep ere they reached Baltimore. But, it was only because of the gloom which enshrouded her, aided by the unsociable presence of her companion, that she did so.

Paine's idea, however, that Cassa would go straight through to New York—as he had bidding Derrick to instruct her—was a wrong one.

When they arrived at the Camden station, she roused her charge, and the two left the cars with other Baltimore passengers.

"Where are we going for to-night?" asked Pearl, as they hurried along the platform toward the entrance.

But Cassa evaded the question, by uttering an unintelligible something, and Pearl did not repeat her inquiry.

They proceeded a long distance after leaving the depot; were entering the lower sections of South Baltimore.

Pearl saw no signs of a hotel—nothing but an occasional grog-shop, a dim street light, rickety-looking buildings; and, at last, they were moving in an atmosphere whose odor suggested filth and disease.

"Where are we going?" she demanded, beginning to feel uneasy as well as tired.

"Be dar presen'ly," replied Cassa.

She turned into a dark, narrow, treacherously-paved alley as she spoke, while Pearl kept close beside her, as if the surroundings had already wrought a fear within her, when the protection of her unsociable, blunt-spoken companion was better than none at all.

Half a square further. Something was pulling at her heart-strings. She did not like Cassa's brief, unsatisfactory speeches; and even her limited knowledge of a community told her that there could be no fit place in this deserted, nauseous-aired vicinity for a young girl to stop over night.

Suddenly, Cassa halted before what was, certainly, the best house in the row—a two-story brick; though even this was dingy and uninviting on the exterior.

In answer to Cassa's summons, the door was opened by a negress of about her own age, and the two spoke simultaneously.

"Sis' Chlo!"

"Cassa—dat you? De Lor' bless my soul! Come in!"

Cassa took hold of Pearl's hand, and the child—astonished, awed, wondering—permitted herself to be led in.

It was a small room, scantily furnished, carpetless, with smeared walls, and a dilapidated stove in one corner, whose pipe had more joints than a supple-jack.

"Who dat?" asked Chlo.

"Sh!" Cassa made a significant motion; and the other female turned to gaze on Pearl, with rolling eyes.

The young girl scarce knew why, but a sudden realization of something wrong burst upon her, an inward monitor awoke a preying terror in her bosom.

For one second she looked at them; then, with her heart in her throat, she turned to flee.

Both the women tried to intercept her. But she was too quick. At one wrench, her small hands tore open the door, and she darted out.

With an angry cry, Cassa sprang forward in pursuit. She saw the small figure only a short distance ahead of her, flying at its utmost speed; but she smiled grimly as she saw, also, that she could overtake it in a few seconds.

At the corner was a liquor den. As the negress dashed up, a number of men came out of this.

"Hello, here, you hag! What are you chasing that girl for?" cried one, grasping her by the arm.

"Le' go me!" she snarled.

Quick as a flash, she dealt him a blow between the eyes, and he reeled backward. Ere the others could act, she was gone round the corner, whither she had seen the child turn.

But Pearl had escaped her pursuer. Gliding into an alley on the opposite side of the street, she turned again into another that crossed it, running with unabated speed—turning finally, when she came out on another of the principal streets—and on, still on.

She looked around her, in vain, for a policeman. She had not met a single soul during her flight. Then she looked back, to see if Cassa was near, and a sigh of relief and joy escaped her lips, as she thought she had escaped the negress.

A jingling bell attracted her. A car of the Blue Line was coming toward her, and she resolved to enter it. But it was a full square off, and she yet felt herself in danger.

Running across the street, she waited, in the deep shadow of a high stone step; and when the car came up, she got into it.

After she had ridden a long way, she breathed freer, for she knew she must be safe.

She asked herself what she should do. And a long time passed, as she sat there in one corner, after paying her fare, trying to decide upon a course.

"I'll go to some hotel," she resolved, at length; "and I'll go back to mamma to-morrow. I'm sure there's something wrong—that colored woman isn't what she seems to be. I'm sure I've escaped from something awful."

She stopped the car, and got out.

But the locality in which she found herself was a good distance north of Baltimore street, and was almost as deserted as that from which she had come; though some of the houses were very imposing, and she knew it was a respectable neighborhood.

"Why didn't I ask the man on the car to direct me?" she exclaimed, as she stood, irresolute, on one of the corners.

She was utterly at a loss what to do.

And even as she gave vent to the words, a hand fell upon her shoulder.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FLIGHT—THE SURPRISE.

To keep her promise to be ready to depart with Claude Paine, in the early morning train, Isabel must needs make the most of her limited time.

As soon as her lover was gone, she set to work—retiring to her room, and summoning her waiting-maid, who gazed in astonishment, when her mistress said:

"Work fast with me, now, Jane; I am going away to-morrow morning;" proceeding to throw open the tops of her trunks as she spoke, and setting the example of her order.

"Going away!" exclaimed Jane, amazedly.

"Yes—at five or six o'clock. Hurry, now. Don't stand there!—assist me."

The two worked diligently, and slowly the trunks began to fill.

"Law! why, what are you going to do about the house, Mrs. Rochestine?"

"Shut it up," half-panted Isabel, as she continued to pack and pack.

"Shut it up! My!—and what about the servants, ma'am?"

"Discharge them," briefly. "Those lace shawls, Jane!"

"Yes, 'm."

Jane's face became very sober when she learned that she was about to lose her situation. It had been a good place to her, and she realized how difficult would be the task to find another like it. She was gravely silent as she aided her mistress.

The hours passed. It was one o'clock, when Isabel drew a long breath, and sat down, exhausted. The last trunk was buckled and locked.

"One!" tolled a bell, on the still night-air.

"There! Now, Jane, go wake up the servants. I ought to have thought sooner, and told them not to go to bed."

"Wake up the servants, 'm?"

"Yes—hurry."

Jane departed on her errand, and Isabel obtained a few moments of rest.

Then she arose and went to her bureau-drawer. From this she took out a number of notes, and counted them over.

"Not enough," she said to herself. "I must give the poor creatures sufficient to keep them until they can get new places."

Descending to the parlor, where the gaslight was still burning dimly, she went to the little desk on the table in the corner, and obtained therefrom an additional amount.

Returning to her room, she found Jane awaiting her, with the five servants of the house, all staring, gazing, wondering.

"Come to my side, Jane," and while Jane handed out the portions of money which her mistress counted to each servant, Isabel worked and talked at once—telling them of her proposed departure, complimenting them on their faithfulness in the past, and expressing hopes that they might not be long without employment.

The money was received with many thanks, but all wore sorrowful countenances at prospect of losing a mistress who had ever treated them kindly.

Now, more than ever, did they grieve over the death of Mr. Rochestine, for they looked upon this sudden breaking-up as one of the consequences.

They were to be ready to leave when she

did; and after lingering awhile, they withdrew to make ready for their going.

"Now, Jane, my traveling suit—and sachel."

While engaged in the last task of dressing for the journey, she gave Jane funds to disburse in payment of sundry little bills.

By 4 A. M. she was in the parlor, tired, worn, sleepy, nervous, waiting for a cup of hot coffee, which Jane was preparing for her.

When the maid returned with a waiter of tempting refreshments, which her spry hands had gotten up in an incredibly brief space, they conversed upon final matters.

"You will lock up the house, Jane, after I am gone—I have confidence in you."

"Yes, 'm."

"And take the key to your home."

"Yes, 'm."

"I will write to you, and tell you where to send the key."

"Yes, 'm; you can depend on me, m'am."

The servants were in the hall, bag and baggage. Scuffling feet and a bumping, dragging sound, told that they were bringing down Isabel's trunks.

The door was closed, and their voices murmured discordantly in the ears of the one who had, with such consummate skill—though not without a cost of strength—accomplished so much in so short a time.

The express wagon came for the trunks in due time; and soon afterward the cart for the servants' baggage was secured.

There were final adieux between mistress and menials; and there would have been a "scene," had not Isabel, forced to it by her already overstrained nerves, abruptly left them, after once more wishing them a prosperous future.

Claude Paine was promptly on hand at the appointed hour. By 6:50 A. M. the lovers were in the cars, steaming over the road.

But, to Isabel's surprise, they did not alight for a change at the Relay House.

And, in answer to her inquiry, he said:

"I have concluded to take the 8:50 P. M. train for St. Louis, from Baltimore. It will prove the quickest plan, in the end."

"And I have had all my hurry and flurry, then, for nothing! That's unkind, Claude!"

"Perhaps I can atone, in some way."

But she did not dream that his only object in hurrying her away from Washington at that unseemly hour was to escape Percy Wolfe, the man he feared and hated as the friend of Horace Rochestine.

When they reached Baltimore, they took the coach for Barnum's.

While Paine went to register, and secure two rooms, and Isabel waited in the reception-room, she noticed a man pass the door, look in at her, then repress, looking in again.

When Paine returned, she said to him.

"Claude, what have we done, that we should be watched?"

"Watched?"

"Yes. We have been under surveillance over since leaving Washington."

"Impossible!"

"No, it is true. I am sure of it. There was a man had his eyes on us at the depot; in the cars he sat near us, and now and then would glance at us slyly; and, not five minutes ago, he passed that door twice, looking in both times, as if to be sure I was here. What can it mean?"

"I will see, if I can."

Paine went out into the hall.

Dorsey Derrick was standing near the balustrade.

"Keep further off, man!" he exclaimed, going up to him. "Confound it! she suspects that we are dogged by somebody. Don't come so close."

"All right," said Derrick. "I won't."

Paine re-entered the apartment.

"I saw no one, Isabel— Ah! here's the servant to show you to your room. Your trunks will be sent up, if you wish—"

"Oh, it is hardly necessary, if we are to start away again to-night. I will dine in my room—with you."

"With me," he repeated, acquiescingly; and added, as she followed the waiter: "Try and get a little nap before dinner. You need it."

When she had gone, Paine sought out Derrick, and the two, lighting cigars, walked down Baltimore street, to converse upon the situation of their affairs.

As they were about to enter Barnard's wine-store, for a sociable drink, Paine suddenly felt some one plucking at his sleeve.

He turned to encounter—the black face of Cassa, the negress, and at sight of her, could not suppress an exclamation of astonishment.

CHAPTER XVI.

NOW YOU'VE GOT HIM—NOW YOU HAVEN'T!

THE tall man and the short man, who were in pursuit of Percy Wolfe, had been thrown off the scent by the latter's very unconsciousness of their presence and intentions.

Perhaps, had he known of what was progressing—that the two were so closely and significantly pursuing him—he would have gone straight to the depot from the hotel to elude them—whoever they were, or whatever they wanted—for, under the existing state of affairs, he would not be detained by any thing in his resolution to go at once to Ingleside, where he would probably meet the party whose utterances had accidentally caused his much excitement.

The short man caught the 12:45 train, after a hard run, just as it was going out.

For some time he remained on the rear platform of the last car, to recover his breath.

Then he adjusted his collar, shook himself and prepared for "business," for, notwithstanding the words of the servant at the National, he believed that the person he sought was on that train.

First, he drew forth a long, slim pocketbook. From this he extracted a card photograph; and at the latter he gazed hard for several seconds.

Restoring the articles to his breast pocket, he nodded his head in a satisfied way, entered the car, and began walking slowly along the aisle.

Every passenger was subjected to a momentary scrutiny by those small, sharp, piercing eyes. But he did not find the one he wanted.

The next car was gone through in the same way; and so on, until he reached the baggage-car. Then he retraced his steps, darting those keen, searching glances on every side.

When he again stood on the platform, he frowned, disappointedly.

"Not here, sure," he grunted. "It's too bad if we've lost him, after all the trouble we've had following him up! Just as we were about to clap hands on him, too. Bah!"

At the first opportunity, he found time to telegraph to the office of the National Hotel, in Washington; after which he took a seat in the smoking-car, to cogitate.

The tall man was soon before the door of Mrs. Rochestine's house. But he saw that it was unoccupied, and concluded that he had either received the wrong direction, or the "bird" had flown.

After lingering awhile, he ordered the driver back to the hotel, where he walked, uneasily, back and forth, before the telegraph window, awaiting to hear from his partner; for he knew that the latter, if he caught the train, would send word here of his success.

"Is there any thing here for Neal Hardress?" he asked, at length.

"Neal Hardress?" repeated the man. "Neal—yes; there's something coming in now."

"Ah!" His face brightened.

"Wait a moment, please." And, when the message was received, he asked: "Are you the gentleman?"

"Yes. Let me hear it."

The message was brief, disappointing, interrogative, as follows:

"Smoking-car, 12:45 train.

"Not on this train. Shall I take 2 P. M. cars back, or wait at depot? Telegraph to Relay."

"KIRK BRAND."

The tall man immediately telegraphed to the Relay House, to intercept the train:

"Go on. Meet me at depot."

For something whispered to him that the man they wanted was no longer in Washington.

Then he ordered a cab, and was driven to the depot, intending to take the 3 o'clock train.

As he loitered on the platform, he noticed a party who was walking rapidly to and fro, puffing clouds of smoke from a meerschaum pipe. At first he paid him no particular attention; but, at one time, the smoker came quite close, before he turned, and, by force of habit, the tall man bestowed a scrutinizing glance upon him.

Instantly he started, looked again and closer; then he drew a photograph out of his pocket, and divided his glances between this and—Percy Wolfe.

In a moment his quick eye caught sight of a faint scar, half-hidden by a newly encouraged beard; and in another moment a complacent smile settled on his face, as he muttered:

"May I never cage a rascal as long as I live, if here isn't the very bird I'm after! That's Percy Wolfe, I'll swear it! And I'm Neal Hardress, detective. Um!—m! If Kirk was only here now! But, I guess he goes on the next

train—and if he does, we'll nab him in Baltimore.

He kept near to his spotted game. Not a movement made by Percy Wolfe was lost by the watchful detective.

When Wolfe bought his ticket the other was right behind him. And Neal Hardress felt relieved of a sudden uneasiness that had come upon him, when he saw that the young man was going no further than Baltimore.

"Got him, sure!" thought the detective, exultantly, as he dogged the motions of his man. "Just wait till we reach Baltimore, my fine fellow, and you'll see something to astonish you."

When Wolfe took a seat, Neal Hardress occupied the next one in his rear.

When the young man sought the smoking-car, to relight his pipe, and find comfort in its fumes, the detective followed, produced a Havana, and, from an opposite seat, calmly watched and waited, while he puffed the scented clouds of bluish white around his head.

On one finger Wolfe wore a magnificent cluster-diamond ring. This was the final argument to convince Neal Hardress that he was not mistaken; for, the moment its wearer drew off his glove, the detective exclaimed, mentally:

"The very ring Herod Dean was seen to wear a hundred times!"

But Percy Wolfe never once dreamed of the surveillance being put upon him. As the reader knows, his whole mind was absorbed with the entanglements that were crossing his mission in that vicinity.

When the train arrived at the Camden station the first thing Neal Hardress saw was his partner, Kirk Brand.

He signaled him at once.

"What's up?" asked Brand, as he joined him, for he saw that Hardress meant caution, by the motion he made.

"We've got him!" was the whispered reply, as he hurried his companion along.

"Eh? No! Where is he?"

"There!"

Percy Wolfe wore a heavy, dark-blue overcoat, with a velvet collar; a pair of light cloth pants; a black, low-crowned hat; and carried a small leather sachel.

To such a personage, just ahead of them, Hardress pointed.

"Is that him?" interrogated Brand.

"For certain! I've had my eyes on him ever since I reached the depot, where I went after answering your telegram."

"So! What now, then?"

"Gobble him!"

"Now?—here?"

"Right away! You grab one side, and I'll grab the other. After him!"

The two stepped briskly forward.

Suddenly the individual with the satchel was startled by the fall of a heavy hand on each shoulder, while Hardress growled in his ear:

"Halt! You are a prisoner!"

With a cry of astonishment the party turned. And the two detectives echoed that cry, with a simultaneous exclamation—for the man was not Percy Wolfe!

They were baffled again.

CHAPTER XVII.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

PERCY WOLFE, on leaving the cars, hastened out at the main entrance of the depot, where he was immediately secured for the Fountain Hotel, by that good-natured negro who is known by the glaring badges he wears, as "Chief Justice of all the Porters."

Any one who has traveled to any extent in the South knows the "Chief"—the man who has lifted more trunks, knows more of depot life, is a better hand at drawing custom, can talk louder and longer, is more polite, and has more friends than any other member of his own race connected with R. R. affairs.

But Wolfe did not remain long in his room at the Fountain.

The best part of the afternoon was before him, and much could be accomplished in that time.

After a hearty meal he set out for Catonsville, to visit Ingleside; and in due time, he reached that admirable institution.

Imagine his astonishment when he learned that Pearl Rochestine was not there, never had been, nor was such a pupil expected at all.

But his heart gave a bound when he heard that there was another, at that moment, in the building, who had come upon an errand similar to his own.

"A lady?—a—"

"Yes," was the reply.

This must be the mysterious party whom he sought, the one whose utterances, on the night previous, contained so great an import to him.

He could hardly be patient. He must see her at once—and requested this.

Then, when the messenger came back with the announcement that the lady had left for the station, just as he came in, his anxiety to be off was such that he stuttered and stammered the necessary apologies, and finally ran from the reception room to his conveyance, which was waiting outside.

"Back!—back to the station!" he cried. "Ply your whip, boy! Go!"

And the horses started at a tearing pace, while Percy Wolfe fidgeted nervously from side to side on his seat.

Three-quarters of the distance had been gone over when the boy asked, "do you want to catch the next car to town, Mister?"

"Yes."

"Then we haven't got much time."

"Go! go! urge the horses."

"Go it is!" yelled the boy, as Percy displayed an additional dollar.

The whip was laid on till the horses broke into a gallop.

Among several passengers who were waiting, there was one female.

She seemed anxious to avoid observation, stood to one side, and he marked that her head was hung in thought.

"That's her!" fell involuntarily from his lips.

But now that the sought-for party was before him, half his fiery impulse deserted him.

He stopped short within a few feet of her.

The young lady was Miss Byrne. She had been to Ingleside, and, like Percy Wolfe had been, was astounded when she learned that Pearl was not there, and was not expected.

She knew not what to make of it. And this was the enigma which absorbed her as she mused on, unconscious of the form that was near her.

After awhile, and just as Wolfe had made up his mind to address her, she raised her eyes.

Some magnetic power drew her gaze directly to him, and their glances met. It was not a momentary glance—they looked fully at each other, as if mutually held by a strange, inexplicable influence.

He was first to speak. With a slightly flushed face, he advanced.

"Madam, or miss, I hope you will pardon me, but I—I—" he broke short.

That influence was weird and overwhelming.

As he gazed into the expressive gray eyes, that were fastened on his face, there was a fascination weaving its network through his senses, a something warm and nameless thrilled in his veins, and he could say no more.

Suddenly she saw the scar which had been Neal Hardress's clew.

Her eyes widened; her lips moved—there was a faint articulation which he could not hear.

He never experienced such sensations, in all his life, as shot through him then, while something tugged at his brain as if to unlock the sleep of a half-buried memory.

In this woman there was a familiarity which struck, puzzled him; a magnetism which defied his efforts at self-control, and he began to tremble.

"Who are you?—tell me," gasped Miss Byrne.

He could not answer. His tongue refused its office. He could only gaze into her eyes, as if chained by a mesmeric spell.

"Where did you get that?" pointing to the scar. "Won't you speak?"

She seemed regardless of the curious glances leveled on her from the crowd of bystanders. Her lips were quivering, her bosom heaved, one hand clenched convulsively, and while her body bent slightly forward, there was a soulful expectancy written in her face.

"Where—where did you get that?"

"Miss, I—it is an old mark—I got it when I was a boy," he stammered, hardly knowing what he said.

"And your name? Tell me your name?" she whispered, quickly, her breath coming in short, panting jerks, as she took a step nearer, with her dilated eyes riveted burningly into his.

"My—my name is Wolfe—"

"Percy? Percy?" she screamed.

"Yes."

There was a sharp cry, and she reeled dizzily. But ere she fell upon the support of the strong arm that was outstretched to save her, she recovered herself, and threw herself wildly on his breast—while he, bewildered, amazed, yet still with that strange feeling in his heart, caught her to him, and looked down into the excited, eager face.

"Percy! Percy! don't you know me? oh! don't you know who I am?"

"Know you?—I—"

"Dear, dear Percy!—don't you know! oh! have you forgotten me?—forgotten Nellie!—your little Nellie!"

"NELLIE!"

He uttered the one word with a gasping, choking breath, and his whole frame quivered in an overwhelming joy—for he recognized her now.

Fifteen years went from his mind, quick as an electric flash.

He saw a sister, nearly ten years old, with whom he used to romp the lawn, soar in the old-fashioned swing, go a-fishing, cull flowers, roam the woods, and love with all the ardor of his honest nature.

And that very scar upon his face was the result of a fall from an apple tree, in the well-remembered orchard, while plucking the fruit to throw into the apron of the merry girl beneath him.

It all came back to him—those halcyon days of youth, when every hour of life was painted like a dream.

"Sister! sister Nellie!" he burst forth, while it would have done you good to see the tears glisten in his handsome brown eyes as he folded her tighter in his embrace: "Is it, is it you, Nellie?"

"Percy! Percy!" she sobbed, as the loved name arose to her lips as she had been wont to utter it when a child; and laughing and crying, almost hysterical in this unexpected joy, she nestled close to the brother who had come back to her after so many long, long years.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN PERIL.

WHEN the heavy hand fell on Pearl's shoulder, as she stood at the lonely corner, glancing right and left, and undecided what to do, her first feeling was that she had been traced there by the negress, and a cry of fear arose to her lips, while she sprung backward to escape the dreaded hold.

But it was not Cassa. She saw a rough-looking man, with hat pulled down over his brow, till nothing was distinguishable but a pair of glittering eyes, and an indistinct outline of a bristling-bearded countenance.

"What's the matter, sis? Did I skeer yer?"

"Yes," said Pearl, timidly. "Who are you? What made you catch hold of me in that way? I don't know you."

"Well, I tho't I mout do y'a favor, that's all," explained the man. "I see ye're a little lonesome-lookin' gal like, an' yer was peekin' roundjer 's if ye'd lost yersel'—"

"And so I have," interrupted Pearl.

"Have, eh? That 'ere's a pity."

"Can't you help me, sir?"

"Me?"

"Yes. I am a stranger here, and I do not know which way to turn. I want to go to a hotel—some good hotel."

"A hotel?"

"Yes. Won't you show me the way?"

"Will I? Why, bless yer heart! yes—I'll—if ye're not afeerd of me."

"Afeard of you?" repeated Pearl. "Why?"

"Cause I'm so dirty lookin'—"

"Oh, that don't make any difference. If you'll just show me, that's all I ask; and—and—if you want money, I can pay you."

Unseen by Pearl, for his face was half averted, he rolled his tongue against one cheek, and eyed her steadfastly from under the shadow of the broad-brimmed hat.

"Why, bless yer heart, little 'un! I don't want non' o yer money. You cling to it. Now, f'yer jest come along 'ith me, I'll take yer to a fuss-class hotel, in no time."

Pearl believed that the man spoke honestly, and she followed at his side, when he started off. "What's yer name, little gal?" when they had traversed a whole square in silence.

"Pearl," she answered.

"Pearl? Well, now, that 'ere is a purty name. Any other?"

"Pearl Roch— Never mind my other name." She hardly knew why it was she checked herself.

The man asked no more questions.

Square after square was gone over, and still no signs of stopping. Her conductor strode silently on.

She was very, very tired; and at last she said:

"I guess we must be pretty near there. I hope so."

"Yes—be there purty soon, now," returned the man.

But it struck her that the locality in which

they were was as evil looking as the one to which Cassa had taken her—no sign of the promised hotel, and, instead, again the occasional dram-shop, with dimly-lighted window, and sounds of coarse revelry within.

Having experienced this kind of thing so recently, and still in a natural fear for her safety, her suspicions were not long in being aroused.

Had she but known that she was on the notorious Douglass street, with its pits of vice, its brothels, gaming-bells, and all that accumulates in filth and wickedness where the lost beings and outlawed offal of a community seek refuge in airs of shame!

Poor, misled child! had she but dreamed of the loathsome section to which this man had brought her, and realized what imminent danger there was for her in its accursed surroundings, her heart would have sunk in sheer fright. "There's no hotel here!" she exclaimed, halting abruptly.

"Yes ther' is. Come on," said the man.

They were beneath a flickering lamp-light, and, for a second, she caught sight of a pair of burning eyes staring down at her, and read in her conductor's face a something that told her she had been deceived.

Alas for her! this warning came too late.

Without another thought than to escape, she turned to fly.

"No yer don't, purty one!" snarled the rough voice, and her arm was caught in a grip of iron.

Ere she could vent the loud shriek for help that was upon her lips, his large, coarse hand spread across her mouth; and lifting the struggling form in his arms, he bore her away, chuckling lowly as he went.

Into one of the grim-fronted dens that are common in that locality we have named he carried his captive—entering at a back door, which he reached after passing through a black, slushy-bottomed alley.

When he closed the door, he glanced around the room.

There were three children, each about Pearl's own age, lying upon the floor—one of them a girl. They appeared half-starved, were miserably clothed, and as they looked up at the man who had so unceremoniously entered, their emaciated faces were woeful to gaze on.

And the man himself—now that we can view him by the uncertain glimmer of a sputtering tallow candle: a ragged, devil-featured human, with bloated countenance, tobacco-stained lips, and eyes of villainous glare; in all, a perfect Satan, when contrasted with the angelic girl who, now unconscious, lay limp in his arms.

There was an old woman seated by a smoky stove, trying to warm her shriveled hands over the smoldering fire.

"Hol!" she squeaked, "what's that you've got there, Rover, eh?"

"A gal. Get some water, Mum, she's fainted."

The three children gazed sorrowfully on Pearl, and exchanged glances among themselves, as the young girl began to return to consciousness under the effect of the cool water, with which the woman laved her forehead.

"Eh, Rover? Where did you get *this* prize?"

"Bless 'er innercencel! she took me fer jest the kindest man in the world. I was showin' 'er the way to a hotel, when she sp'icioned me, an' started to run. So I jest grabbed holt on 'er—an' here she is."

"Isn't she pretty, though! She'll make a good thief—ha! ha! nobody would suspect her, if she stole any thing! Good! Good!"

"Yes, she'll make a good 'un."

"A prize! A prize!" croaked the old shewolf, while her eyes glistened like daggers, as they fixed on the beautiful face of their captive.

Pearl's eyelids slowly opened, and she gazed bewilderedly about her.

"Don't you make no noise now!" hissed the ruffian, "or I'll wring yer neck!"

"Yes, we'll wring your neck for you!" echoed the female, in her cracked, harsh voice.

The young girl's heart was almost standing still.

"What are you going to do with me?" she faltered, rising to a sitting posture on the creaky settee where they had placed her.

"How do you like the hotel?" mocked Rover.

"You have deceived me! You have brought me here for no good—I know you have!"

"That 'ere depends."

"Oh! let me go—let me go, please!" cried Pearl, making a movement to rise, as she pleaded.

But he forced her back to the settee, while the hag screamed:

"Hol—let her go!" Hear! How's that.

Rover?—hear!" As she laughed, she displayed her toothless gums; and she rubbed her skinny hands together till every knuckle cracked.

Pearl was acutely terrified. She saw that the beings before her were hardly human; she comprehended that they meant her no good; and she, a frail, helpless girl, could not battle long against them in case they attempted to do her an injury. This latter thought made her shudder, for she could not foresee what terrible fate was in store for her.

"So, yer want to know what's a-goin' to be lone to yer, eh? Well, ther ain't *nothin'* goin' to be done, providin' yer behave yersel'."

"But, I never harmed you, I am sure!" wailed Pearl. "Oh, please let me go."

"Hesh 'p thet recket!" growled the villain. "Nobody's goin' to hurt yer. As to lettin' yer go: yes, we'll let yer go when ye're ready to swear."

"Swear? Swear what?" exclaimed the trembling girl, gazing from one to the other.

The man and woman exchanged glances; then they looked toward the three half-starved children who cowered away in a far corner; then they fastened their devilish eyes on Pearl.

"See here, now," said the man leveling a fore-finger at her, "ye're a girl 'at I believes has got some learnin'. Yer can see 't once what we mean, when we say 't yer must come to be one o' us."

"One of you? I don't understand—indeed I don't! What do you mean?"

"Don't yer want yer liberty?"

"Oh! yes, yes!" cried Pearl, hopefully, while she clasped her small white hands against her bosom, and leaned eagerly forward.

"Well, if you promises to do what them 'ere children over there does, every day, why, then yer kin go. But, mind: they hev to come back here every night; an' if they was to try to get away, I'd find 'em, an' I'd cut their hearts out! Understan', now?"

"No, I don't—I don't! I don't know *what* you mean!" and her fear of the two wretches increased momentarily.

"Hol! you don't, eh?" snapped the female, staring at her. "Then I'll tell you; you've got to steal for us—"

"Steal!" the one word fell from Pearl's lips in a quick, startled accent.

"Yes, steal—steal! And bring us what you steal. And we'll feed you. And we'll take care of you. And if you try to run away, Rover 'll find you out, and he'll kill you! Hear?—he'll kill you! Now, then, swear it! Down on your knees and swear—or you'll never go out of here alive! Hear me? Down!—down, I say!"

"I *won't* steal!" cried Pearl, panting for breath.

"You'll never go out of here, if you don't!" screamed the shewolf.

"I don't care *what* you do! I *won't* steal!" and her whole frame began to quiver in a strange excitement, as the object of her captors dawned upon her, and the iron in her nature roused her to fearless resentment.

"Look 'e here, gal"—the man stretched forth a hand to grasp her.

But she started to her feet, and sprung beyond his reach.

"Keep off! Don't you dare to touch me! Oh, you cowards!—you wicked, wicked wretches—"

"D—n yer, I'll—Down on yer knees, an' swear what we want yer to, or I'll—I'll—"

"I *won't*! I *won't*! I'll never be a thief—if you kill me! I *won't*!" and she confronted them defiantly, with her little fists clinched, her face aglow, and the blue eyes bright and stern, fixed upon them unflinchingly.

CHAPTER XIX.

ANOTHER SURPRISE FOR PAINE.

We cannot faithfully describe the expression which came into Claude Paine's face, as he turned to discover who it was that plucked at his sleeve, on the corner of Baltimore and North streets.

To simply say that he was astonished would scarcely portray his condition—for that astonishment contorted his face into a dark, scowling, incredulous-fronted visage, very much unlike the handsome features of a few moments before.

Derrick, too, stared in wonderment.

But Paine's uneasy surprise was not yet complete.

"Perdition! woman!—what are you doing *here*?"

The exclamation was so sudden, hissing, penetrating that Cassa recoiled.

"The deuce!" muttered Derrick. "I thought you were in New York, by this time."

Then Paine perceived that Cassa looked worried. There was a restlessness in her eyes that betokened a mind ill at ease; and he saw, further, that she wished to speak, but hesitated.

The little scene had already drawn the gaze of numerous bystanders, who were early at their favorite loitering-place; and he motioned her to follow him, as he wheeled abruptly and started toward Fayette street.

"What in thunder do you suppose is the matter?" questioned Derrick, as he kept by the other's side.

"Matter? Confound the fates! I believe she has bad news to communicate."

"Bad news?"

"Yes."

"What makes you think so?"

"Did you not tell her to go straight through to New York?"

"I certainly did."

"And I bought tickets for that city. Then how came she here? Why did she leave the train? I *feel* the bad news coming!"

When Paine reached Fayette street, he crossed over to the unfinished City-Hall side, where there were fewer pedestrians, and would be more of an opportunity to speak with Cassa without attracting attention.

The negress was close behind them. When she came up, Paine demanded again:

"Why are you in Baltimore? Didn't Derrick tell you to go to New York?"

"Yes," answered Cassa; "but you tole me I mus' keep de chile, an' dat's why I's here—now."

"What do you mean?" sharply.

"When we kem to destation place, she go get up a' ter drink o' water, down t'oder en' de car; an' when I looks fo' her, bress goodness! she done *gone*."

"Fool! why did you permit her to leave you?"

"I see'd 'er runnin' along on de outside, an' makes a'ter 'er; but she fool me, somehow, an'—"

"And has escaped you?"

"Yes—she 'scaped."

The exciting news immediately worked upon him.

First, he cursed the negress—then he cursed what he called his bad luck.

"Confound the nigger!" grunted Derrick.

"I's been lookin' all roun' town, de whole o' las' night, an' dis mornin'—'fo' de Lo'd I has! But she's gone for *shuah*."

For several moments Paine could not utter a word. He looked down at the pavement, with starting eyes; his hands clinched, his face reddened.

He scented danger in this accident. Would not Pearl, with the money she had, repair straightway back to Washington; learn of her stepmother's departure; perhaps, by some means, follow them up—trace them to Baltimore, to St. Louis; eventually make known to Isabel what had transpired, and thus, possibly, ruin all his well-laid schemes?

He saw plainly the child must have suspected that all was not right. But, if so, what had happened to arouse such distrust? *Why* had she fled from the negress?

He did not stop then to answer the question.

He reasoned that Pearl would make direct for her home—if she was to be secured at all, the place to catch her was at the vacant house in Washington.

Cassa must return, then, at once. Derrick must accompany her. The two might be successful, if they acted in prompt concert.

All this passed like telegraphy through his brain—the decision was reached with the rapidity of an electric spark.

Derrick stood quietly to one side, with hands rammed into the full depth of his pockets.

"Woman! I'm afraid you've made more mischief than can be undone by your carelessness!" Paine exclaimed, suddenly. "If this child gets back to her mother—"

"Your tin pan's *bu'sted*!" inserted Derrick.

"I am utterly ruined!" finished Paine; adding, hissing: "and if she does, you will soon be as poor as you ever were. Did I not tell you you should have all the money you wanted, if you you served me faithfully?"

"Yes, you tole me dat," admitted Cassa, meekly, for she already felt sorry enough at prospect of losing the regular salary agreed upon.

"I knows you tole me dat. But what's I goin' to do?"

"You must go back to Washington—and, Derrick, I want you to go with her."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Both. Go up to Mrs. Rochestine's house, and wait there, and watch. I feel sure that Pearl will hasten there. You must secure her."

"But what if she resists?" suggested Derrick, inquiringly.

"Threaten her! You can terrify her. But I would not do her any real harm, if I were you. She must be secured, at any cost," and he added, to the negress: "If you are successful, I'll give you another hundred."

"How am I going to find you again?" Derrick asked.

"I will wait for you at the Southern Hotel, in St. Louis—a week, if necessary."

"All right—"

"Now go. Be off, without delay. Watch at the house, and you will catch her. I know she will go straight there. Don't you see how natural it would be for her to do so?"

"Yes. Come on, nig," the last to Cassa.

Derrick started down North street, and the negress followed.

They took the first train for Washington.

Claude Paine drank several times at the counter of Barnard's wine-store before returning to his hotel.

He did not seek the society of Isabel. He felt that his mind was in no state to permit of calmness then; and it was not until the dinner hour came around that he had sufficiently quieted himself to venture into her presence.

They dined pleasantly together, and the meal was followed by a long *tete-a-tete*, teeming with passionate interchanges of sentiment and affectionate caresses.

Late in the afternoon he was pacing slowly to and fro before the office counter, a cigar between his lips, hands folded behind him, and deeply wrapt in thought.

There were several new arrivals; and, as he passed the large book that lay open on the counter, he involuntarily glanced at the hieroglyphicked page.

As he looked, he paused. Then he drew closer. A new excitement came upon him. Something had startled him—a name; and that name was:

PERCY WOLFE.

"He here!" flashed through his mind, with a force that gave him a shock; "curse the fates! I wonder if he has tracked me?"

He strode rapidly away up the stairs to his room. From his room, he sent a message to Isabel, as follows:

"If convenient, I would like to see you. Shall I come?"

And the waiter brought back, in answer:

"Always at leisure for you, Claude."

He was shortly with her.

But she did not imagine that his object was to be sure that she did not show herself by any possible chance, to any one in the hotel—for that very one might be Percy Wolfe, his dreaded enemy.

And every minute was an hour to him, that must elapse before he could flee again from the man he feared.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ARREST.

PERCY WOLFE, when he returned to the city with his sister, secured rooms for himself and her at Barnum's.

He went to the Fountain Hotel, and removed his trunk; then repaired to the depot after Nellie's trunk, which she, in her haste to get to Ingleside, had left at the former place.

After they were finally seated alone in Nellie's room, their mutual joy was renewed—such a joy as can only exist between brother and sister, after so many long, long years of separation.

Their hearts were full; lips could not speak fast enough the countless things they had to say. It was the picture of childhood rewrought, in which they almost reassumed the sunny garb of youth, in their very smiles and tears, and foolish yet happy utterances.

At last, however, young Wolfe sobered in his transports, checked the gossip of his tongue, to

"Where's father, Nellie?"

He read his answer in the downcast eyes and sorrowful face.

"Dead," she whispered, tremulously.

The air was hushed around them.

"And mother?" in a suppressed, hesitating voice.

"Dead, Percy—dead!"

A strange, hallowed calm prevailed. He drew her close to him.

"Then you have been lonely. And I so far away, that you really had no one to—but where's Diamond? She must have grown to be a beautiful, beautiful girl by this time! Tell me: where is she?"

For a second, she was struggling with some

powerful emotion; then she threw her arms around his neck, and gazed up at him—her eyes dimmed with tears that were just ready to trickle from the lid.

"Percy!—she, too, is dead!"

"All dead?" he murmured, looking absently down at the carpet.

"All!—all!" she breathed, tremblingly. "But, oh! Diamond is far happier than she would have been, had she lived."

"What do you mean, Nellie?"

"She died of a broken heart!" The words were spoken so low, that he could scarcely hear what she said.

"A broken heart, Nellie? How? Explain."

"I will. It was when she was sixteen years old. But, she was a woman then—and oh! so lovely. A perfect earthly angel, Percy; and it seemed as if she loved everybody, for she was only happy when doing something to please others—"

"Just like your own sweet self," he broke in, earnestly.

"And she was loved by every one," went on Nellie. "One man, who was visiting at our little village, became infatuated with her—worshiped her, as he said; and she, poor child, was won by his pretty speeches and handsome face. He flirted with her, and she believed him sincere. Though I heard him myself promise to return, at a day not then far off, and make her his bride. But he never came, Percy—never!"

"Go on, Nellie! And our dear little sister?—Diamond?"

"She waited long for him, sorrowing more and more, as the weary months rolled by; until—at length, she—" Nellie covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud.

"Tell me the rest." His own cheeks were wet with grieving tears; but he was prepared for anything now, since he had learned that father and mother had both passed away forever from this life.

"I watched her tenderly; I did all I could. But she died, Percy—she died in my arms. I shall never forget the sweet smile in her face, when she looked up at me, and said, 'Good-by—good-by, Nellie—sister.' And the last breath called the name of the man who had dealt her this blow! Oh! Percy—and I so dearly, dearly loved her!"

She wept bitterly. She was not, at this moment, the calm, self-possessed Miss Byrne that she had been while in Mrs. Rochestine's employ, for, now the woe that she had so heroically concealed from the eyes of strangers, overwhelmed her as she drew under the sympathetic fold of a brother's arm.

"Don't weep so," he said, soothingly. "What was this villain's name?"

"Claude Paine."

"CLAUDE PAINE!" He stared in amazement; he hardly believed his ears.

"Yes."

"What!" thought the young man, "can it be, that the Claude Paine I am pursuing, is the destroyer of my sister's life? By Heaven! if 'tis so, I will rend him limb from limb!" and then aloud: "Nellie, I am hunting for a Claude Paine!"

"No?" looking at him incredulously through her tears.

"But, I tell you, I am. Can it be, that this same villain is the man I am after? In London, I had a friend named Horace Rochestine—"

"Ah!" She leaned forward quickly.

"This friend died—"

"Yes, yes; I know."

"You know?"

"He died of fever, did he not?—months ago?"

"How did you hear it?" in wonder.

"I was governess to their child, Pearl—if it is the same—"

"Pearl! Yes—it must be the same. Why—"

"I was governess to their child. It was my only means of living, Percy."

"You governess to Pearl Rochestine?"

"Yes. I left their house yesterday, after Pearl was sent away, as they said, to Ingleside—"

"Ingleside!"

"Yes—"

"But I have been there, too. Pearl is not at Ingleside!"

"I know she is not. And oh! Percy, I fear for her. Her stepmother is in love with this very Claude Paine—I know it. And he loves her."

"By Heaven! Claude Paine is a scoundrel," cried Percy, as he now felt convinced by his sister's words, that Paine and Isabel Rochestine must be in league together to rob the child.

"Have you any idea where he is, Nellie? He has Horace Rochestine's will."

"Horace Rochestine's will!" Nellie gasped in astonishment.

"Yes. And I firmly believe that he and Mrs. Rochestine have plotted to cheat Pearl out of her inheritance."

"Oh, Percy!"

"I do—I do."

"But you can easily find this man, by going to Washington, and asking Mrs. Rochestine where he is. She knows—"

"Mrs. Rochestine is not in Washington," he exclaimed, growing more agitated.

"Not there?"

"No. I was at her house this morning, and it is closed."

"Then she has gone to California—to Sacramento."

"Ha! how do you know?" fairly trembling in excitement, and half-starting up.

"Pearl told me that her mother was on the eve of departure for that place—"

He sprang to his feet with a cry.

"Then we'll be after them to-night, and close on their heels. There's a train to-night for St. Louis. We will go on that. I've no time to lose. I must be off after tickets, and tell them at the office that I am going. There, don't detain me, Nellie, don't detain me!"

Snatching a hasty kiss, he darted from the room, in a wild state of mind, to arrange for their immediate departure.

The individual with the sachel, who was so unexpectedly collared by Neal Hardress and Kirk Brand, at the Camden Station, was rather timid by nature, and he came near sinking down in terror, as those startling words were growled in his ear:

"Halt! You are a prisoner!"

"I beg pardon, sir," apologized Hardress, while he half held up the trembling man, "we've took you for some one else."

"Yes, a—some one else—I assure—I swear I never did anything! Your apology is accepted. Certainly, that's all right—ha! ha!—it's all right," as he stammered and forced himself to laugh, his knees were cracking together, and threatening to bend under him, and when Hardress released him, and he started away, he did not run—but he walked *real fast*!

Brand grunted.

"This is a fine go!" he exclaimed, as they left the depot. "How did you ever come to make such a blunder?"

"I can't see. I know I had the right man 'spotted.' He was on that train, and now he's slipped right through our fingers. What's to be done?"

"Bless me, if I know! The only thing left is to begin over again."

"Well, we'll begin over again."

Just then they collided with a man who was hurrying toward the outgoing cars.

"Hello! Neal—Kirk!" he shouted.

"Why, Sales!" exclaimed the two detectives in a breath, and Brand asked:

"Have you trapped Estelle Berkely, yet?"

"No, I haven't. I don't believe she's in this city after all. I was on the point of coming over to see you, in Washington, for a consultation."

"Well, it's the same luck all around."

"Haven't you got him yet?"

"Nary got—"

"Come over to the hotel, and let's talk there," said Hardress.

Within a short space, the three detectives were in the office of a hotel—and that hotel was the Fountain. It was blind fate.

"Might as well put up here, anyhow, for to-night, I guess, or till we can look around," suggested Hardress.

"Yes," acquiesced Brand, and the two turned to the counter, to register.

To their utter amazement and delight, the very first name they saw on the book, was that of Percy Wolfe.

"Hooray!" chuckled Brand; and

"By thunder!" blurted Hardress.

They were on the track again.

The hotel coach at Barnum's was waiting for its passengers.

Nellie was inside the conveyance, awaiting her brother, when a lady and gentleman got in whom, to her astonishment, she immediately recognized as Claude Paine and Isabel Rochestine.

Here was a discovery. She drew her veil closer round her face, while her heart palpitated faster.

Presently Wolfe approached.

Just as the young man had his foot on the step, two men laid hold upon him.

"Halt there, Percy Wolfe! we want you!"

"Arrest me! For what?"

"To answer for the disappearance of Herod Dean, in the city of London—"

"There is some mistake—" he began.

"Isn't your name Wolfe?"

"It is."

"Then there is no mistake. Come."

He was at first bewildered. But he soon comprehended.

"Nellie!" he cried, turning to his sister.

"Hush!" she cautioned.

A scream had arisen to her lips, when she heard the words of the man who detained her brother, yet, with admirable presence of mind, she not only smothered that scream, but uttered the timely caution—for the very parties she and her brother were in search of, sat there, in front of her, and she did not wish to arouse their suspicions as to her identity.

"Nellie!" he continued, in an undertone, for he too, saw that there were others in the coach, "this charge can not keep me long, I am sure. There's something wrong, but it will soon be adjusted, never fear. You go on. Here—take this."

He handed her his pocket-book.

Then she leaned close to his ear, and whispered, rapidly:

"I will send a letter for you, to the office of the Planter's hotel, in St. Louis. You can follow its directions, and you will either find me, or further directions—and so you can trace me up. I have found them already!"

Ere he could speak again, or ask her what she meant by saying she had "found them already," he was forced away by Neal Hardress and Kirk Brand.

Nellie's wits were keen. Before her sat the pair they were in pursuit of. They were going to St. Louis, like herself, and she reasoned that they might make a stop there. Hence the shrewdness of her quick words to her brother.

And as the coach moved off, and Nellie prepared herself to watch the couple into whose presence a strange fate had thrown her, she saw a half-angry, half-triumphant gleam in Claude Paine's dark eyes, as he gazed out at the prisoner who was being led away.

CHAPTER XXI.

PEARL AND HER CAPTORS.

PEARL ROCHESTINE faced the ruffian and the crone with a fearlessness that, for several seconds, balked their comprehension.

Nothing could induce her to comply with the evil demand they had made—nothing could terrify her so far as to cause her to swerve from the golden precepts that had been instilled into her heart.

A thief? Never! No matter what the alternative, she would never be that.

The man glared upon her; the crone, taken aback by the unexpected action of the child, craned her neck, and widened her small, sharp eyes to their greatest capacity.

The three children watched the tableau in fright, and the girl whispered to her companions.

"Rover 'll kill her!"

Then Rover uttered a loud curse, and snarled, savagely:

"Look 'e here, gal, yer'd better mind out! Ain't yer goin' to do what we wants?"

"No, I am not!" panted Pearl.

"Yer won't?"

"No, I won't!"

He was growing red with rage.

"Wait, Rover; wait! I'll fix her!" gibbered the woman, grinning diabolically. "Let me settle it! 'Oho! we'll soon take the starch out of you—you little fool! I'll fix you!—I will."

She stepped quickly to one side, and took a long, thin strap from a peg in the wall.

The three children knew what this meant, and they gazed sympathizingly on the unfortunate girl. They had felt that strap, till their shoulders were bruised and scarred.

"What are you going to do with that?" demanded Pearl, compressing her lips tightly.

"Ho! you'll find out! We'll show you—we'll show you!"

"Yer'd better mind, now!" said Rover, threateningly.

"Will you swear?" mocked the wolfish female, as she advanced, menacingly, and flourished the significant strap in the air.

"No, I won't!" cried Pearl. "Don't you dare to strike me with that!—don't you dare!"

The woman shuffled nearer.

Pearl's teeth clinched together, and she assumed a threatening attitude.

The three children scarcely breathed.

"I'll give you one more chance!" squeaked the woman, with another of her malicious grins.

"I don't care if you give me a hundred!—don't you dare to strike me with that, or it'll be the worse for you! I tell you I won't!—I won't!—I won't! And I'll scratch your eyes out if you come near me. I'm not afraid of you!"

"Take care!" The bag circled the strap above her head.

"Cut 'er!" growled Rover.

The children gasped simultaneously, and recoiled.

Down came the strap, with a hiss and a whiz—a merciless stroke that might have drawn blood.

But Pearl was fully aroused—her whole nature was fired—she was blind to all bodily danger for the moment.

With a quick, sharp cry, she caught the descending strap—though the contact blistered her hand—and, with all her little strength, she wrenched it from the other's hold.

Then, with lightning rapidity, she struck—a blow that coiled the strap around the woman's neck, and wrung a shriek of pain and rage from her shriveled lips.

But she had not time to repeat the chastisement. Rover grasped her in his powerful arms, and pinioned her struggling form, as if in a vise.

The woman tore away the strap, that was nearly strangling her, and with every outline of feature hideously distorted and writhing, sprung forward, screaming:

"Let her go, Rover!—let her go! I'll teach her, the scratch cat! Let her go! Let me get at her! I'll kill her!"

"Hold on," commanded Rover, interposing an arm between the struggling child and the upraised strap.

"Let me get at her I say!" screamed the woman. "I'll kill her for that blow!—I'll kill her!"

"No, yer won't, neither. We ain't a-goin' to have no killin' around here, 'cause I ain't just ready to be hung yet. Now, hold on—"

"But she had no business to strike me!" shrilly.

"Never mind now; you jest hold on. Le' me fix 'er."

"What'll you do? Eh?—what'll you do?"

"Put 'er down the hole," with a devilish grin.

The female seemed suddenly pleased. She immediately acquiesced in the man's suggestion.

"Yes, yes, yes; put her down the hole! Ho! my little stretch-cat, that'll bring you to your senses!"

She restored the strap to its place on the wall.

"Let me go!" cried Pearl, as she fought in vain to release herself.

"Fetch that 'ere light," said Rover.

She caught up the candle and brought it toward him.

Rover clapped a hand over his captive's mouth, and drew her toward one corner.

The woman gripped a ring in the floor, and raised a large trap-door, discovering a hole beneath that was black and forbidding.

"Will yer keep yer mouth shet, if I take my hand away?" he asked.

Pearl nodded her head affirmatively. She was almost suffocated.

The moment she could speak, she wailed:

"Oh! don't—don't put me down in that awful place!"

"Hush up! Yer sed yer'd keep yer mouth shet."

"But you won't put me down there, will you? Oh, don't—please don't!"

"Down with her!" snapped the woman.

"Will yer swear what we wants yer to? Come, now, it's yer last chance."

"No, I won't!" suddenly and defiantly. "Go on, you cowards!—do whatever you will! I'll never be a thief!"

"Down with her!" yelled the woman again.

Rover took Pearl up, and stepped to the edge of the hole.

"Mind: if yer make any more noise, I'll let you fall!" he threatened.

There was a rude ladder leaning against one side of the opening, and he began a cautious descent of this, for it creaked and bent when his bulky weight rested upon it.

But Pearl made no further resistance—she saw it would be useless.

Rover set her down on the damp earth floor of the cellar, and then returned to the room above, pulling the ladder up after him.

"Now then," chuckled the woman, waving the

candle so that she could look down at the captive child, "see how you like that. You'll stay there with the rats, and catch cold, and be sick and hungry; and you won't get out till you're ready to swear! Hear?"

The trap fell with a thud, and Pearl was in darkness.

She sunk to her knees, and bowed her head to her clasped hands.

"God pity me!" she moaned, sobbingly, as her poor heart felt the full hopelessness of her condition. "Oh! papa—papa! I wish I was with you. If it is wrong to wish for death, I can not help it, for I do, I do wish I could die, and come to you in heaven!"

Then, groping about her, she discovered a pile of planks in one corner, on which she sat down, while the realization of her terrible situation continued to prey and prey upon her mind, until she could have cried out in agony.

At last she laid down. She was so tired that, even had her troubles been doubly augmented, she could not have forced off the drowsy feeling that came over her.

She slept. On that rough, hard couch her body found rest, and the weary eyelids closed in slumber.

The damp air of the place made no difference; even the starved rats that ran noiselessly around did not disturb her: and at one time her lips moved, as, in a sweet dream, she thought herself once more in the dear old home, roaming through its apartments and halls—and with the loved voice of her governess speaking, as she had so lately done, those warm encouragements to bear up under trial, and look to Heaven for hope.

Almost night again.

During the day following Pearl's imprisonment, she scarcely heard a footstep overhead. All was ominously still.

About noon the woman had let down a piece of stale bread and a bottle of water, by means of a rope; but she did not utter a word.

At first the young girl could not touch the miserable food; it was repulsive to her. But hunger compelled her to it at last, and she ate by force.

All day long she had been silent—thinking.

When daylight came, it had disclosed a little square hole at one side, on a level with the pavement.

A faint hope arose in her bosom; but it was doomed to dispelment when she saw, also, that she could not escape in this way, for it was crossed by two stout iron bars.

Why not call for help, and attract the attention of some passer-by?

"No," she thought, with sad resignation: "if I do these wretched beings may kill me, for they look wicked enough to do any thing. And I do not wish them to stain their hands with the crime of murder."

Then, when the blue eyes filled with tears, she added, lowly:

"But I am not afraid to die! No—I would see papa, then; I would be free from all my sorrow. For I can't believe I've done anything to keep me out of heaven. I have tried so hard to be good; and I am sure God is too merciful to count my little shortcomings when I have done my best."

And the moments passed, as she sat there dreaming of what heaven might be to those who gained it, and reviewing her young life with an earnestness that few girls, even of older age, ever once think of.

The place grew darker and darker as night deepened, until she was enveloped in a weird, uncertain gloom.

Presently she detected a light, catlike step in the room above. In a few seconds the trap-door was noiselessly raised and laid back on its hinges, admitting a dim stream of light.

Then, to her surprise, she saw one end of the ladder appear at the edge; and this began to lower and lower—all as quiet as if an invisible agency was working with bodiless things.

When the ladder touched the ground, and Pearl looked up to see what was coming next, she discovered a boy's face gazing down at her.

"Hush!" he admonished, in a low tone. "Come on."

"Come on?" repeated Pearl, inquiringly.

"Yes—come on. Come quick. Don't make any noise."

Halt-bewildered, she arose and went to the ladder.

The boy, who had been on his knees, now stood up and beckoned to her.

She ascended.

"Be quiet. Be very quiet," he cautioned.

when she reached the top. "Now come on—hurry."

He led the way out at the side door, and she, with wild, joyous sensations, followed him.

She was free!

"Oh! thank you—thank you!" she cried, pressing his brown, dirty hand in her own white palms.

"We ain't safe yet," said the boy, uneasily, as he quickened his pace, and glanced, half-frightened, around him.

"How could you do what you did?" she asked. "Where's that fierce woman?—and that ugly man?"

"Why, Sal—that's the gal you saw last night—she's been arrested, and old Mum—that's the woman—she's had to go and get her out. Rover goes out always at daylight, and never comes home till twelve o'clock at night. So, you see, there ain't anybody home. I felt real sorry for you, down there in the cellar—indeed I did; and as I'd made up my mind to run off to-night, whether Rover caught me again or not, I thought I'd help you, too."

"God will reward you for it!" she exclaimed, fervently.

"But we ain't safe yet. We'd better hurry some more."

They were fleeing eastward. Soon they reached Aisquith street, and turned to the right.

When they were on Baltimore street, they went slower—going west.

"Where did you live?" asked Pearl, as they continued along.

"My home's in Richmond. Rover stole me away from there three years ago."

"And are you going right straight there?"

"No, miss, I—" he hesitated. "I can't go right off. I must hide about Baltimore till I can steal some money—or something to sell for money."

"You mustn't steal," said Pearl, taking hold of his arm and looking earnestly into his face.

"I know it's wrong," he murmured, "but I can't do any thing else here in this city without being in danger from Rover. If I was to go to work, it would take so long to save up money to get away, and live all the time besides, that he'd be sure to find me. I know you're one of the good kind of girls—I think you're one of the rich sort. I don't blame you for being careful. But I'm nobody—it don't make any difference whether I steal or work, for I won't beg. Nobody cares for me. Why, if I was to find my father and mother dead when I get back to Richmond, I—I wouldn't have a friend in the world," and he had to utter the last speech rapidly, for his voice was failing.

"Yes, you have got a friend," whispered Pearl. "There is somebody who cares for you."

"Who?" he asked, in surprise.

"I am your friend. I'll always remember you; and I'll never forget to pray for you, that God may reward you, as I cannot, for what you've done for me to-night."

He gazed at her, half-incredulously, though his eyes were dancing and glistening. It was something new for the ragged street child to hear a voice like Pearl's; and as he looked into her lovely face, his heart was thumping wildly.

"Now, you must not steal," she continued. "Promise me you won't."

"Why, I believe I'd promise you anything!" he cried, emotionally. "But it'll take me a long time to raise the money I need; and maybe Rover'll find me out, too. But, I don't care—I'll promise you; I will, indeed!"

"You need not wait a day. I'll give you the money to go home with."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Why, didn't Rover take everything away from you?" he asked, in wonderment.

It did seem strange that the ruffian had not robbed her of all she possessed; but there was the pocketbook, with its contents all safe.

Under the first lamplight they came to they halted.

Pearl handed him three ten-dollar bills.

"Why, Miss—you—you ain't going to give me all this?" he stammered, while the hand that held the notes fairly trembled, and refused to close over them.

"Yes. Put it in your pocket. It isn't safe to show every one what you've got. Now, let's go to the depot—the Washington depot."

"Do you live in Washington?"

"Yes."

"Well, here comes a car that'll take us to Howard street, and then we won't have far to walk to the depot."

"Let us get in."

They entered the approaching car, and Pearl paid the fares, with the air of a woman who feels that she has much depending upon her maintenance of a dignified yet gentle mien.

During the ride, the boy was feasting himself on the beauty of her face, and mentally blessing its owner, over and over again, for the great favor she had done him.

They reached the depot; but there was no train till 8:30.

Both were hungry, and they ate plenteously from the tempting dainties that were on the stand near the ladies' waiting-room.

When, at last, the youthful pair procured their tickets, and took their seats in the car, they had not been gone from the waiting-room five minutes, when Claude Paine and Isabel Rochestine entered, and the latter sat down on the very cushion Pearl had just vacated.

Had the young girl lingered only a few moments, she would have met her stepmother, would have met the man who was acting so treacherously toward her, would have met her governess, Nellie Wolfe.

But the programme was otherwise ordained by—the blind variance of human action.

When they arrived at the Washington depot, Pearl stopped near the entrance to bid her companion farewell, and thank him anew for the services he had rendered her.

"Can you find your way over to the other depot?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," he answered, quickly, "I've been here before," adding: "and I'm ever so much obliged to you, miss. Good-by. Think of me sometimes, please."

He raised her hand to his lips with a grace that would have become a true knight.

But Pearl partially anticipated him.

Ere he knew what she intended, she leaned forward, and gave him a quick, warm kiss with those ripe, sweet lips; and while his senses whirled, she whispered:

"Yes, I will always think of you. Good-by. And whenever you are tempted to do wrong, you think of Pearl—that's my name—and the kiss she gave you."

"I will! I will! Good-by!" he cried, and tore himself away from her ere she could see the tears of joy that were welling in his eyes.

As he ran along the street, he murmured:

"God bless Pearl!—God bless her! I'll never forget that kiss!"

They never met again.

Pearl looked after him, till he was gone from sight, and then she thought of herself.

There were the familiar cars before her—the bright blue sides she had seen so often on the Avenue—and an indescribable thrill pervaded her frame as she thought how near she must be to the house she longed for.

It was with a glad feeling that she entered one of the cars, and retired to one of the upper corners, where she could avoid the gaze of the other passengers, and be undisturbed in her half-sad, half-happy thoughts.

When she alighted at —th street, her heart fluttered as she started, almost on a run, toward her home.

But the gloomy, deserted look that had come over this home, caused her to pause abruptly.

Not a light was visible—not a sound to be heard, and a premonition of something wrong, made her breath come fast, as she looked up at the darkened windows.

"Oh! what can it mean? Has mamma gone away? What has happened?"

While she hesitated and wondered, a sound fell upon her ears that, for a second, chilled her veins.

It was a low, chuckling, triumphant laugh.

"By Jove! here she is!" exclaimed a voice.

Two shadowy forms darted out of an alley, not ten paces distant from her—a man and a woman, and the latter caught her roughly by the arm.

One terrified glance sufficed to show her who it was, but ere she could utter the despairing cry that was on her lips, Cassa, the negress, had checked the alarm, by placing a hand over her mouth, and Dorsey Derrick hissed forth:

"So, we've caught you, Miss Flyaway! Silence, now, or it'll be the worse for you. Don't you yelp, now, else we'll have to do a little choking! Understand me, eh?"

CHAPTER XXII.

A PENDING CRISIS.

NELLIE WOLFE was untiring, unrelaxing in her close watch of the couple who, she believed, with her brother, were plotting to cheat Pearl Rochestine out of her lawful inheritance, by spiriting the child away, through some evil, inhuman means, with the intention of entirely deserting her.

For, that Pearl was detained by some wicked power, in some obscure place, she now felt convinced, both by the fact of the deceit with regard to sending the young girl to Ingleside, and by Percy's suggestion that Claude Paine had an interest in keeping Pearl out of the way, if he was to wed the widow of Horace Rochestine.

When the train started, and she had time to reflect, while she continued her important vigil, the late startling scene at the hotel came back to her vividly, and caused her a deep, painful, wondering anxiety.

What had her brother done? What did those men mean, when they said he must answer for the disappearance of some one whose name was Herod Dean? She could not imagine. The name was new to her.

She felt Percy was in some great danger, and she shuddered to think what that danger might be, and whence its rise.

But he had seemed confident. He said there could be nothing to detain him long; and, remembering this, she partially consoled herself, by forcing the belief into her mind, that he was innocent of any crime, and would, in keeping with his promise, follow after her almost immediately.

Still, her mental uneasiness was by no means thoroughly subdued, and throughout the entire trip, there was a vague train of thought within her, upon the possible peril menacing him.

Claude Paine and Isabel, upon arriving in St. Louis, took rooms at the *Southern*—that finest of all hotels in the Mississippi valley.

Nellie had examined the pocket-book given her by Percy, and found that it contained ample funds to carry out her plan of pursuit, even had the pursued parties led her a long chase before heading for Sacramento.

She, too, engaged a room at the *Southern*—and, by merest chance, it was the very next apartment to that occupied by Claude Paine, with locked folding-doors between. This she did not discover, however, until she had been several days at the hotel.

Among her first acts, she addressed a note to the office of the Planter's hotel, for Percy Wolfe—to be delivered to the person who should claim the letter, by that name.

When Paine availed himself of the first clear day, to invite Isabel to ride, and view the city, Nellie did not lose sight of them for a moment.

While they were being driven along the great twelve-mile Avenue that is destined to become the boulevard of this continent, she, in a carriage, was following close behind, ordering her driver as they ordered theirs; when they slackened their speed, to gaze on the parks, the cathedrals, the fair grounds, the handsome residences—or, again, glided swiftly along Fourth street, and finally returned to the hotel—wherever they went, she was there, with her watchful eyes noting every movement, every turn, and, sometimes she was near enough to hear the melodious laugh that was Isabel's subtlest charm.

In the evening, when Paine and Isabel went to the theater, Nellie was on hand, occupying a seat in the opposite box, and, with the aid of glasses, she spied upon their every action.

Isabel had wondered at her lover's stopping so long in St. Louis, after expressing such eagerness to traverse the Continent at once; but he quieted her surprise and curiosity, by informing her, that he had met a party at the office of the hotel, who had only recently come from Sacramento, and who brought such news regarding the business crisis, as entirely served to allay his fears.

"Now that we have plenty of time," he said, one day, as they were ascending from dinner, "let us get a good rest here, and enjoy ourselves while resting."

"Anything you say, Claude," she answered, with her wonted smile, and it would seem by the zest with which she entered into his little plans for amusement, that the dead husband was long ago forgotten—as completely erased from her memory, as if he had never held a place there.

But Claude Paine, with all his assumption of gayety and vivacious humor, was, in his heart, terribly uneasy.

He had not yet heard from Derrick. So many days had elapsed without the expected arrival of his confidential associate—and no message, either—that he began to fear and surmise as to the stability of his schemes.

Why had not Derrick written?—or telegraphed? Why was he not there in person?

"It is very singular!" he mused, aloud, one evening, as he sat, in dressing-gown and slippers, before the warm grate—with elbows on the chair-arms, forefingers pointed together, and eyes fixed steadily on the glowing fire; "Der-

rick never acted in this way before. Can anything have happened? Can it be that the child is eluding them?—and is searching for Isabel? Still Derrick ought to send me word of some kind; this suspense is growing unbearable."

He shifted his position, was silent and thoughtful for some time; then he broke forth again, while his lips writhed in a peculiar way:

"If it was not for this trifling difficulty about Pearl, now, I would certainly think I had managed things with unprecedented cleverness. If I don't hear from or see Derrick here by to-morrow, I shall move, and he may—But, by Jove!"—suddenly remembering—"Dorsey Derrick has got the will! He never handed it back to me; and I have had so much to attend to that I forgot it up to this moment! What if he should play me false?—use the document against me? He could ruin me! But he has nothing to gain by it—why should he do it? If he does"—and he scowled as the dark resolve came into his heart—"by the Eternal! I'll track him over the whole world, till I find him—and then I'll have his life!"

"Oh, villain!"

"Hal who spoke?"

It was a sharp, penetrating whisper, a half-hiss, that interrupted him, and the source seemed to be directly behind his chair.

He sprung from the chair, and glanced quickly round the room. But he was alone.

"Surely, I heard a voice!"

He looked into the closet, under the bed, in the wardrobe, behind the rich folds of the window-curtain—and discovered nothing.

"It was not fancy," he muttered, as he resumed his seat, still gazing dubiously about him; "I cannot have imagined so distinctly. And yet I believe I am growing slightly nervous. The words—Perdition! the words came from there!" and his eyes rested on the folding-doors.

He heard a faint rustling in the adjoining room. Then all was still.

A fierce scowl settled on his face.

"I have been spied upon. I have, perhaps, betrayed myself by my cursed forgetfulness. I'll find out who you are—eavesdropper!" nodding significantly toward the door.

But Claude Paine was destined to learn more than he wished, when morning came.

While arranging his toilet for breakfast, with his usual care and precision, there was a rapid thumping at his door.

In considerable surprise, he answered the summons; and he half-believed that Derrick had arrived at last.

Then, with a cry of astonishment, a feeling of dread, he recoiled a step, for the waiter who stood there handed him a card, the name on which caused the color to recede from his face, and his eyes to start and stare.

"PERCY WOLFE!" he exclaimed, with a choking gasp.

A low voice echoed the name, and the servant saw the young lady of the next room issue forth quickly into the hall, and approach them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AGAIN IN THE TOILS.

THE sudden appearance of Cassa; the rough grip in which the negress caught her; the lowering expression on the black countenance—where the whites of the eyes stood out, and the glistening teeth gritted, as she grinned in triumph; the savage threat made by Dorsey Derrick, while he leered down upon the unfortunate object of Claude Paine's persecution; all this filled the child with a nameless, agonizing terror, and she nearly sunk down at their feet.

But there was a quick reaction.

Seeming to be gifted with a strength remarkable for one so young, she tore away the rude hands that pressed over her mouth, and, at one desperate wrench, freed her arm.

In breaking the hold the negress had fastened upon her, she so bruised her tender flesh, that she could not suppress a cry of pain.

But that cry swelled to a wild scream; and as she darted away from them—

"Help! Help!" rung from her lips, in accents of alarm.

But the flight and cry were useless.

Ere she had taken a dozen leaps, her enemies were after her, swift and angry—presently catching her; and Derrick closed his vicious hand, like a contaminating coil, around her fair throat.

The appeal for help wasted itself on the surrounding stillness. But there was a window thrown up on the opposite side, from which issued a stream of light, and a head was thrust out, whose owner gazed up and down the street.

The three were out of sight, however, in the surrounding shadow, and the window was presently closed.

"Now will you be quiet—or shall I choke you to death?" hissed Derrick, as he partially loosened his half-deadly grip.

Pearl could not recover her breath for some time; when she could speak, she wailed:

"Oh! what—what are you going to do with me? I never gave you any cause to hunt me down like this! Won't you let me go—to mamma, please?"

"What's you goin' to find her? Your mother ain't dar," said Cassa, bluntly, with a nod in the direction of the house.

"Not there!" cried Pearl, in a pitiful tone.

"Where is she, then?"

"Done gone away an' lef' you to de keer of me," the negress replied.

"Your mother has gone a long way from here," indorsed Derrick, "and you have no real friends but us."

"You—my friends?"

"Yes, we are. And I'll tell you why we are. If you go along quietly and behave yourself, we'll do you no harm, at all, I promise you. If you make a fuss, I'll have to choke you again, and we'll take you anyhow. Where you do go we'll take good care of you; and when your mother comes back you may return to her," the last persuasively.

"You don't mean that," demurred Pearl.

"You'll never let me go back."

"Yes, we will. Come, now, make up your mind which way it shall be. You are all by yourself, and we could do whatever we wanted to with you. But we don't want to hurt you if we can help it. Will you go?"

"Take me," said Pearl, in a low, subdued voice, and she hung her head and clasped her hands before her, and they led her away.

The threat and the promise combined had made her submissive; but there was a hopeless, miserable feeling in her tortured bosom, as she walked silently along between the two.

"Where's we goin'?" asked Cassa.

"We can't go over to Baltimore, to-night," he replied.

"Where's we goin', den?" she repeated.

"I wonder if the child will behave herself?" he said, inquiringly, ignoring her question, and looking down at Pearl.

"Yes—I don't care," Pearl muttered, absently.

"I ax you where's we goin' at?" persisted the negress.

"We will go to the house of a man I know of, on L street, who will give us shelter for to-night; and in the morning we'll go to New York. Now, see here"—he put the question very abruptly—"was that story true, about the child getting away from you at the depot in Baltimore, by going after a drink of water?"

"At the depot!" exclaimed Pearl, raising her eyes quickly. "Why, did she tell you it was at the depot that I got away from her?"

"You chile—shut you mouf, now!" snapped Cassa.

"Humph!" grunted Derrick. "I thought as much. Now, nix, tell me the true 'cause why' of the child getting away, from you. Come, make a clean breast of it."

"Well den I tell you. Dare am no use fo' to go to New York wi' de chile—"

"Why?"

"'Cause I's got a sister in Baltimo', what lives 'way out of de way of everybody, an' thar's where I went at; an' de chile would be jus' as safe from doin' of de gen'leman trouble, as if she war in New York. So now."

"That's it, eh?"

"Yes, 'tis."

"And you think the child could be as safely kept out of the way in Baltimore as she coul' in New York?"

"I does," emphatically.

Derrick reflected a moment.

"Now," he said, presently, "if you are sure she could be safely kept—"

"I is shuah," interrupted Cassa.

"Then I don't see any necessity for your goin' to New York."

"Dere ain't no necessity."

"Well, we'll talk it over in the morning."

Cassa glanced down at the child, with an expression of feature that conveyed, in a sort of spiteful triumph.

"Now den—what you get by stickin' you tongue in!"

But Pearl did not see the evil look, nor feel the malignant gleam of the dark eyes; she was again silent and pensive—continuing on between them, as if she had no will of her own, but obeyed in a sort of wakeful insensibility, the voices of her two captors.

Near to the West End Market stands a frame building of unique shabbiness. Its front is battered and stained by rain and wind, till the knots in the planks stand out like so many ugly warts of monstrous size; and the frames of windows and door have long since sunken from the exactness given them by the carpenter's "spirit-level."

It is a miserable hovel, taken altogether, hardly tenable, and of skeleton-like appearance; yet over the door of many cracks and seams hangs a scarce legible sign—

"BOOTS AND SHOES

MADE AND REPAIRED."

To this uncouth establishment Dorsey Derrick conducted the negress and their captive.

Before the door he paused, and rapped loudly; and a voice on the inside answered with:

"Come in then, an' shtop the racket on me door, before ye thump a hole through 't."

They entered a room that was bare and dingy, with an atmosphere of leather and dirt.

At one side a stove was hot and red; over the floor, whose planks tilted and groaned beneath the weight of the comers, the usual litter of a shoemaker-shop was strewn; and on a bench, by a crooked candle—with hammer and awl in hand, and the stump of an oil-soaked pipe in his mouth—sat a short, stout, red-faced man, with spectacles hung on his nose, and a bristling beard on cheek and chin.

The eyes in the spectacles ogled and turned, and his broad mouth twisted downward at the corners, as he looked up at them.

"Hello, Connaught!" saluted Derrick, immediately, as he closed the door after him.

"The devil ye say!" exclaimed the puller of wax-ends. "It's yerself, Dorsey Derrick!"

"Yes—me. Get up, Connaught, and listen to me. I've come on business."

"Business is it? 'Av' ye a shoe to mend—"

"Bah! no. Get up—"

"Well, then, d'ye go on now, an' devil the bother 'a' me gittin' up when I've shtuck to the bench all day, till me legs is bent to the fit o' it. Who the devil's that?—an' what the devil's that?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

CASSA TELLS WHAT SHE KNOWS, AND DERRICK THINKS ON IT.

THE Irishman looked at Cassa, over the top of his spectacles; then toward Pearl; and finally gazed at Derrick, as he added, in a high key:

"Is it to Heaven ye've been, an' shtole a angel—then been to the other place, an' marri'd the gran'mother of ould Beelzebub? Did I iver see the likes?—look a' the nagur! Bless me soul! but she's wan of the blackest!"

"Cease your nonsense, Connaught—"

"It's ceasin' I am. What the devil d'ye want?—ow! look a' the swate bit of a gurl!—for all the world a picture, sure."

"I tell you to listen to me—"

"Sure me ears is bigger than a jackass's, with listenin' for what ye 'ave to say! Why don' ye go on?"

Pearl had drawn near to the stove, for she felt chilly; and though she heard all that was passing, she scarce heeded it. Her mind was bewildered and dreamy, as if she hardly cared to think upon any thing, save the unsettled, miserable feeling that worked its enervating influence on her faculties.

Cassa—except when the Irishman made the uncomplimentary allusion, and caused her eyes to turn, for a moment upon him, with a coruscant gleam in their dark depths—was watching the child closely. She was determined that Pearl should not have an opportunity to escape a second time. She had, already, come very near losing the prize that was to accrue her a regular and comfortable salary, and, as such chances for obtaining money were of rare occurrence, she would not, by lack of vigilance, run another risk—particularly as the young girl would be more apt than ever, now, to try to get away, since she knew she was being detained for a purpose.

But Pearl had no idea, then, of escape. She was quiet, submissive—hopeless.

"Connaught," said Derrick, with a mysterious air, "I want a room for this girl," pointing to the child.

"A room?" repeated Connaught, in a tone of mingled surprise and inquiry.

"Yes; and it must be a strong one."

"A strong wan, is it?"

"Yes—"

"An' did ye expec' to find the same in this ould shanty? Why didn' ye go to a fash'nable hotel?—ye've plenty money, I know."

"And some of that money is for you, Connaught," with a nod and a significant wink.

The Irishman winked also; then he screwed up one corner of his mouth, as he glanced covertly at Pearl. In the same moment he arose from his bench, and, leaning close to Derrick's ear, whispers:

"What's it all mane, anyhow? Who's the gurl?—what are ye goin' to do 'id her?"

"I tell you, I want a room—up-stairs, to keep her in till morning. Here's a chance to make ten dollars."

"Me, is it?"

"You—if you do what I want, and ask no questions."

"Tin dollars!"

"Yes."

"An' I must hould me tongue?"

Derrick nodded.

"Hist, then! Bring the gurl, an' I'll do that same—though the cracks in the boards is a'most big enough for the bird to slip out. Tin dollars?—an' hould me tongue? Come on, then." He took up the crooked candle and moved toward the back room.

Come, child," said Derrick, touching the child on the arm.

She followed him, without a word.

A creaky stairway led to an apartment in the second story; and in this apartment was a mattress, with several ragged blankets on it, while, at one side, a broken pitcher and a dirty basin made up the chamber furniture of the poverty-stricken shoemaker.

"There's water for ye," said Connaught, indicating the pitcher. "Ye'll find more slape on thet ould mattress than ye dream of—an' a jewel's as good in the dirt as a gem on the finger. Will I lave ye the light?"

"No," answered Pearl, absently.

She stood near the center of the cheerless room, her fair head drooping, and her mind absorbed in a state that has no name.

They left her alone; and as they withdrew, she heard the key turn loosely in the lock, and realized, more thoroughly than, how much of a captive she was.

For a long time after being left to herself, Pearl remained motionless in the dark surrounding; and as her eyes gazed strainingly downward, strange luminous visions seemed to rise before her—pictures of the past, amid golden sheens and brilliant flashes; familiar scenes and faces, until she almost believed she heard the voices of those who had been her dear companions and playmates at a time when she little dreamed how soon and abruptly she was to be separated from them, never—as her heart felt now—to see them or speak with them more.

Again, in the solitude of her imprisonment—as when she had sat dreaming on the planks in the cellar of the house in Baltimore—she thought of her father, till her heart beat faster and faster; and, at last, his face appeared in the center of her imaginary seeing; and her lips moved in a tremulous whisper.

"Papa!—Papa!" she breathed, involuntarily. But the sound of her own voice broke the spell that was upon her.

With a long, deep sigh, she groped toward the rude mattress.

When she laid down on the comfortless couch, an overwhelming grief asserted itself, and she cried in a low, hysterical way.

Derrick and the Irishman returned to the shop. The first named drew a frail stool forward, and bade Cassa sit down.

When the negress was seated, she rested her elbows on her knees, sunk her chin to her hands, and gazed stoically at the fire, which Connaught had just given a severe poking.

Derrick threw himself carelessly upon a large chest, at one side of the stove, and lighted a cigar.

Connaught refilled his pipe, and resumed his work, and, for a long while, there reigned a silence that was only broken by the rapping of the hammer, as it drove the pegs, and the indefinite, drawing strain of an incomprehensible hum which the Irishman indulged in.

"I wonder where Claude Paine is, by this time?" at last spoke Derrick, putting the question to himself, as he puffed out a ring of smoke and watched its ascent.

Cassa looked up quickly; then she fixed her gaze again on the fire.

"You knows," she said.

"Eh? I wasn't speaking to you."

"I say you knows—you knows where he is," she reiterated.

"I?"

"Yes—you knows, jes' well's I does."

"And do you know?"

For a second she glanced at him.

"Yes, I knows."

"The deuce you do! What do you know?—how much?—where did you learn?"

"Mis'r Paine, he done gone wi' de chile's mother, who he goin' to marry."

"Thunder!" he exclaimed, with surprise.

Connaught pricked up his ears, but went on with his work and his humming.

"I knows—de gen'leman, he goin' to marry de mother of de chile, 'cause de money b'long to de chile, 'cordin' to de will 'at's done been gi'n to Mis'r Paine, by de chile's father—an' dat's why Mis'r Paine he don't want de chile in his way, an' gi's her to me; 'cause, den de chile don't get de money, an' de mother she do, an' he get de widder—an' she, I guesses, done gone dead in love wid him. An' dey run off together. So, now."

He stared at her in astonishment.

"D'ye mind the plot av 'em!" exclaimed Connaught, inwardly, as he hummed the louder, and drove in a peg with a whack of unusual force.

"Where did you get all this, woman?" Derrick demanded.

"Hi! Done hear him tell you all about it, de night of de bargain, up on 'Costia Ridge."

"O-h! then it was you who eavesdropped in the bushes—and not a dog, eh?"

She nodded her woolly head.

"And," he continued, "if Claude Paine had caught you at it, do you know what he'd have done?"

"What he'd done?"

"Knocked your head off, probably."

"Sho! I's seen him befo', I has. I could tole de madam what he's in love with a tale 'at wouldn't be nice. So."

"What do you mean?"

"I means dis: Claude Paine, he am a vilyun. He make love to a little gal out West, long time ago, an' den run off an' broke her heart, he did. I was dar—I wo'ked fo' de fam'ly. Knowin' he's a vilyun, I wanted to jes' see de more vilyunny he was drivin' at. An' I foun' out, too. I b'lieves de mother of dis chile ain't so much better'n he is neither—dey bofe am plottin', as I magines, to rob de gal outen de money. So."

"What was the name of the family out west that you say you worked for?"

"Where de gal was dat Claude Paine he broke her heart?"

"Yes."

"Dey was name' Wolfe—an' if de gal's brother, he ever come back from over de ocean, where he went when he's a boy, den let Mis'r Claude Paine look out, fo' he kill 'im shuah!"

"Wolfe!" Derrick repeated, quickly, several times. "What was the other name of this brother? Do you know?"

"Dey call him young Mars'r Percy, when I see him las'—long time ago."

"Percy Wolfe!" thought Derrick; "the brother of the girl whose heart Paine broke! And he is here!—already on Paine's track, for other causes. By Jove! here's a regular mess."

Silence again prevailed.

When the Irishman signified his intention of retiring, he gave Cassa a couple of old blankets, and the negress curled herself up, in a sitting posture, in one corner, where she soon went to sleep.

Derrick remained seated on the chest, after Connaught went up-stairs, still puffing at his cigar-stump.

And, in the dim light afforded by the red stove, he was watching the smoke-clouds that arose from his lips, and pondering upon something momentarily important which had entered his mind—that something aroused by the words of Cassa, the negress.

An hour passed. Then he seemed to have framed a resolution of some kind which gave him satisfaction, for he muttered inaudibly, smiled in a peculiar manner, cast aside his cigar, and lying down on the chest, managed to fall asleep.

In the morning, at an early hour, Connaught was up, and preparing his usual scant breakfast fare.

A pot of coffee bubbled and hissed on the stove, and an odor of stale fish frying was the unpleasant cause of Derrick's awakening.

"Here's your ten dollars," he said, when he handed the Irishman the promised amount.

"Thank ye for a gintleman," Connaught pocketed the money, and gave the fish a scientific turn in the pan.

Derrick started up-stairs, to look after Pearl. Cassa was standing near the stove, with her eyes fixed hungrily on the solitary fish.

"Is it hungry ye are?" burst forth the Irishman, suddenly, as he noticed her wistful stare.

But, ere she could answer, there came a cry from the room above.

Cassa hurried to the stairway, half-fearing what that cry meant.

Derrick appeared at the upper landing, and growled down:

"By Jove! nig, the gal's gone!"

CHAPTER XXV.

PEARL'S ESCAPE.

PEARL—poor suffering child—was crying herself to sleep.

Lower and slower came the painful sobs, and the face that was buried in the coarse ticking of the pillow, was gradually calming and drying, as the mild influence of slumber began to weave its blisses of forgetfulness around her sorely-tested heart.

Slowly, slowly a quietness formed within her chafed spirits—as if a guardian angel were smoothing all the ruffled tides of thought, and pouring balm upon her soul-deep wounds.

Slowly to sleep—and yet, not so; for the jetty, silken lash had not ceased its tremor, the breathing was not of that gentle regularity characteristic of the repose of one so young in years.

Nor was the somnolent god to light her visions then, with the gilded beauty streaming from the portals of his mystic realm.

Suddenly the eyes started open—the head, with its wealth of hair, half-raised upon the pillow; and eyes and ears were strained in the darkness of the room, as she listened to the murmur of voices beneath her.

The flooring of the apartment was thin and worn, making audible the dialogue between Derrick and Cassa, that was in progress in the shop below.

"I mean dis: Claude Paine, he am a vilyun!"

These were the words that had aroused her—so distinct, so significant, so impressive.

Then she bent forward attentively, as the negress went on to explain how Claude Paine had broken the heart of a confiding girl in the far West, and sent the deceived one to the grave, while he lived on in gayety and carelessness, as though his act had merited no censure.

And there was more. She crawled noiselessly forward to a crack in the treacherous planks—through which came the faint glimmer of the candle—and looked down upon the two who were conversing.

Her bosom heaved with pent-up excitement as she drank in Cassa's words—heard the latter declare a belief that Paine and Isabel were striving to rob her (Pearl) of the benefits of a father's will.

She could scarce smother the exclamation of pain and surprise that arose to her lips, when she heard the negress utter her suspicions; and it was with a strange, inexplicable feeling that she drew back, breathing fast, and pressing her hands to her throbbing heart, to think upon what had been suggested to her mind.

It was a brief period of thought. She was quick at framing conclusions, and, in a few seconds, she forced herself to believe that Cassa must have spoken the truth, that Claude Paine was her enemy, and to him she owed all that she had suffered since the hour in which she learned of her father's death.

With the conclusion, she asked herself if she should be submissive, if she should meekly bear the trials being put upon her; and with the question, again did the iron in the nature of the child-woman assert itself, for she clinched her little fists, and whispered firmly, through her set teeth:

"Never! I would bear a good deal, but I will not be trampled upon—for I do not believe that God means that, when he tells us to be humble before our enemies!"

Heaven was guiding the young girl's instincts—besides infusing strength into her system, and the fire of stern purpose into her veins—for she turned involuntarily to one side of her prison, and discovered a board shutter swinging; boltless, on its leather hinges before a window that had neither sash nor glass.

To steal across and open this, without the slightest sound to betray her, was but the work of a moment, as her intentions formed rapidly in her brain—and, joy! not five feet beneath the sill, the roof of an adjoining shed, that slanted toward the surrounding fence, met her eager gaze.

With cautious movement she stepped out—soon she reached the fence.

The jump to the ground was not high; and, in a few more seconds, she was fleeing swift as a hunted bird, and thanking Heaven for her unexpected deliverance.

But there was a thought preying upon her—one that she could not banish; and, while she ran, she murmured, tremulously:

"Oh! mamma—mamma! Can you—can you be my enemy, too? No, no! I won't believe that of you—it's too unkind!"

As she passed the black aisle of the West End Market, the form of a man emerged, shadow-like, from the screening darkness surrounding, and hurried after her, uttering a low chuckle as he went.

He must have worn gum shoes, for the swift pace of his pursuit was noiseless, as he glided over the pavement.

At the corner of Nineteenth and I streets, Pearl halted to recover her breath and glance about her.

All was deserted and still.

"Where—oh! where shall I go?" she asked herself, in her indecision.

The words died in a choking exclamation, a half-suppressed cry; she turned to find herself in the grasp of a powerful man.

And that man was Rover.

It was with a thrill of horror that Pearl recognized her old enemy and persecutor.

Despair, dread, a feeling of a soul oppressed—all these preyed overwhelmingly upon her, as she gazed with a terrified expression into the evil, sneering, triumphant visage of the man from whose clutches she had thought herself free.

He transferred his hold, in a painful grip, to her wrist, and half-hissed, half-growled, as he eyed her frowningly:

"So, yer tho't yer'd get away, eh? Yer tho't yer'd beat me, eh? But yer was wrong, gal; yer couldn't get away from Rover, yer couldn't—"

"How—how did you find me?" she panted, while her heart was nearly standing still, and her face turning pale as death.

For she knew the man was a brutal wretch, a character to hesitate at nothing that crossed the desires of his evil nature. She trembled for herself; her tongue nigh refused to mold the utterance of her lips.

And he marked the fear his presence inspired, for he grinned devilishly, and squeezed his hard hand tighter round her wrist; while she struggled heroically to keep down the outcry the pain of his rude grasp threatened to force up.

"How did I find yer, gal? Why, I'd 'a' found yer if ye'd gone to the other end of the world. One o' my boys seen yer goin' off with the other boy, an' 'e tracked yer. He met my ole woman, an' told 'er what was up, an' told 'er to tell me to come over to Washington, that he'd meet me at the depot when I got here. So 'e did. He's a bright 'un, he is. He follered yer up here, an' when I come over on the next train I saw 'im an' 'e told me where yer was, an' I come here to watch for yer, an' I've caught yer, an' I'll teach yer—"

"Oh! let go of me—let me go!" she cried, making a frantic effort to release herself.

"Hold on here. No, yer don't, my chick. None o' that now," threateningly, and only gripping the harder.

"Let me go!" she wailed, fighting him with her disengaged hand.

Rover saw that this thing would not do. Her cries and the noise might attract the attention of a policeman.

"Shet up that racket," he snapped, "or I'll kill yer!"

"Let me go! Let me go!" she screamed.

"D—n yer! I'll—"

"Help! Help!" rung piercingly on the still night air; and—

"Help it is!" echoed a voice, close at hand.

Succor was near.

Rover vented a blasphemous oath, and attempted to take her up in his arms.

But her struggles defeated him.

There was a quick footstep beside them; a third party dashed upon the scene.

"Scoundrel!" uttered a deep voice.

Thud! fell a blow on the villain's head that sent him reeling across the curb. Pearl leaped to the protecting arms of her rescuer, with a joyous cry.

Rover recovered himself, and, snarling a malediction on the head of him who had so opportunely interfered, he strode forward to retaliate, with his huge fists doubled, and evil face red with rage.

"He'll kill you!" whispered Pearl, uneasily.

"Kill who?—me? Guess not," was the brief return; and he added, addressing Rover: "Now—rascal!—you come within two feet of me, and I'll riddle your head off, by thunder!"

The street lamp shone full upon the faces of the two men.

Of all the weapons with which to fight a coward, the human eye is the keenest—for a coward fears the glance of a brave and honest man.

Pearl's rescuer eyed the fellow steadily, fully prepared to meet any attack; and Rover paused before him, hesitating.

"Now, you'd better be off, or I'll give you some more of the same sort!" with a meaning nod.

Rover wheeled abruptly from the spot, looking back at them, and shaking his clinched fist, while he muttered:

"I'll fix yer yet for this!—mind!"

"Well, girl, who is that vulture?" asked Pearl's new friend, when Rover had disappeared in the direction of the Friends' meeting-house.

"Oh, he's a wicked, wicked man!" she exclaimed with a shudder.

"Umph! Should say he was. But who is he?"

"I don't know, except that his name is Rover. I escaped from him, in Baltimore, only to-day—"

"Escaped from him, eh?"

"Yes, sir. He had me confined in a damp, dirty cellar, and said he would keep me there until I promised to—to—steal," and her head bowed, and the last words came whisperingly from her lips.

"Steal, eh? The rogue!"

"But I got away from him," she continued. "He had other children there, and one of them helped me out. I would have been in his power again, though, if it hadn't been for you, and he's so wicked, I don't know what he might have done to me."

"Torn you to pieces, perhaps—the tigerly ruffian! But, come now, you'd better run home—Do you live in Washington?"

"Yes, sir, I did—"

"Do, eh? So. Well, you'd better run home now—run along. I'll watch you till you're out of sight. Guess there's no danger, and—"

But Pearl did not move.

"Well, why don't you go?"

She looked pleadingly up into his not unkind face, and there were tears gathering in her eyes.

"Oh, sir! I have no home to go to. I am all alone in the world—all alone!"

"Eh? Why, you said you lived here, in Washington!"

"So I did, at one time; but that's past. And it was a happy, happy home, until they told me papa was dead. From that hour all that could make a young life like mine miserable came to fill my heart with sorrow. I am not a beggar, sir; time was—and it's only a short week ago—when all that mind could wish for, or wealth furnish, was given me. But papa—papa—died; and—and—mamma—she's gone far away—maybe I'll never see her again. When I came back to the dear old house to-night, it was all deserted and dark—not one sign to welcome me. All my dear friends are gone; no one of them knows how unfortunate I have been; and I have thought that God would be merciful, if he called me to Him."

She buried her face in her hands, and the tears that were ready to start now coursed down her cheeks, as she sobbed out her bitterness of spirit.

He looked at her with widened eyes, as he listened to this utterance of woe, and was astonished at the language—so correct and soulful—with which the (to him) mere child made known so much of her trouble.

"Bless my heart!" he exclaimed, still staring, and he added, immediately, in his blunt way, though a little softer:

"Well, now, this won't do—never in the world! Here, come along with me. I'll soon fix things right. Come—"

"Where to?" she asked, looking up through her tears, while a sweet hope arose in her bosom.

"Where to? Why, to my house, of course! Come along."

"Oh, sir! Do you mean it?—will you take me to your house?—for I believe you are kind-hearted—you look so."

"Mean it? Gad! of course I mean it. I feel wonderfully interested in you. So, come along now. Come."

Pearl's heart beat with joy as she started off with him, for she felt sure she could not be mistaken in believing him to be a man of generous heart and sincere nature.

"What's your name, my girl?"

"Pearl."

"Pearl? What else?"

"Never mind my other name, please."

For, abrupt as had been the question, as suddenly it had flashed upon her, that, to tell her full name might make a "scandal" in that society where her stepmother was so extensively known; and she resolved that nothing should be said against "mamma," even if Cassa had been right, when she said that Paine and her stepmother were plotting in common against her.

And though he insisted, she was firm. Her last name was held sacred and unuttered.

She had, indeed, at last found a friend.

At his house he ordered the servants to supply her every want, and attended to all that could make her comfortable and contented.

On the staircase he bade her good-night, and said, as he held her hand a moment:

"Get a good sleep. I want you to look rosy in the morning."

Then, as she left him, and followed the servant-maid up to her room, he gazed after her, and uttered to himself:

"By George! I'm wonderfully interested in that girl. I must know more about her. Wonder who she is, anyhow?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

INNOCENT OR GUILTY?

It was a blessed haven that had opened to Pearl.

Cyrus Cruffold, her new-found friend, was a blunt-spoken man of some forty odd years, yet sincere of nature, generous of heart, and not the one to refuse that aid which it was in his power to render the unhappy child.

His residence was not far from Pearl's recent home; but, as he had not been at the Capital much over a month, he had not, as yet, heard much of Mrs. Rochestine, though the name was familiar to him.

He was from New York—himself and family, of wife and servants, with an intimate friend of his wife's who had not been long in America.

It was a cosy, comfortable room to which Pearl was conducted, after exchanging "good-night" with her friend, and the young girl slept soundly—a feeling of safety and rest within her, that she had not known for three weary days past.

When she awoke next morning, and prepared to descend, she was glad to see, by a glance at the mirror, that she could "look rosy"—as Cyrus Cruffold had expressed it.

At sound of the bell, she went down-stairs. Cruffold was at the foot of the balustrade, evidently waiting for her, and, on her appearance, he extended both hands in a warm, cheerful greeting.

"Good-morning," he said, in his blunt way.

"Ah! you've got the roses on your cheeks."

"Um! Good. You slept well?"

"Oh, yes"—taking the outstretched hands, and smiling as she looked into his kind face; "I did sleep very nicely. You are very kind to me, Mr.—" not till then did it strike her that she had not ascertained the name of him to whom she felt so grateful, and she blushed as she hesitated.

"Cruffold's my name—Cruffold," he prompted; then added: "and Cruffold is a friend of yours. Come, now, we'll go in to breakfast. Don't be timid at all."

But Pearl was a little timid, notwithstanding, as he led the way to the breakfast-hall; and she kept close by his side, as if she feared that she might still further need his protection.

Two ladies were seated at the table.

One of these was Mrs. Cruffold. The other was Estelle Berkely.

The latter was not so fleshy a woman as when we last saw her; her face had lost much of its natural color, the half-imperious, queenly carriage of the head was missing; and the eyes, that were once so brilliant and piercing, were now a little heavy, and, at times, restless in their expression, something was gnawing at the woman's heart; mind and body were suffering.

"Mrs. Cruffold, Miss Berkely—a surprise for you!" said Cyrus Cruffold, as he gently pushed Pearl forward.

They gazed in astonishment.

"Why, Cyrus, what does this mean? Who is this?"

Estelle was looking hard at the child, a strange, bewildered light in her eyes, as she scanned the features of the unexpected comer.

"It means," replied Cruffold, "that this is Miss Pearl, a dear young friend of mine—stop; explanations in due time, Mrs. Cruffold. No more at present. Pearl, sit down—here, alongside of me."

Mrs. Cruffold was mystified. But she asked no further questions; for, when her husband said "no more at present," she knew that importunities would be useless.

As Pearl's name was uttered, Estelle started slightly, and there was a scarce perceptible arching of her brows. A look of recognition swept, for a second, over her face.

Pearl departed herself in a way that delighted Cyrus Cruffold. He soon discovered that she

was educated far beyond her years—in short, that she was a woman in all but age.

Each moment that passed found him more and more interested, until, in his enthusiastic attentions, his habits of bluntness almost entirely vanished, and smiles that were rarely seen on his face, were following his speeches in rapid succession.

Mrs. Cruffold marked the scene with half-jealous eyes.

After breakfast, Cyrus Cruffold escorted his protegee into the parlor. In one corner stood a guitar of rare workmanship, and, as Pearl caught sight of it, she could have leaped toward it and grasped it in her eager hands.

She had one at her old home, and had been carefully instructed in its use. Many a pleasant hour had been passed in company with it, playing or singing, too, the little tunes or songs, she knew her father liked so well. It was one of her favorites.

"What a beautiful guitar!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands, and gazing longingly at the instrument.

"Eh? Can you play on it?"

"Oh, yes; I'm very, very fond of it."

In a trice, he had seated her on a sofa, and placed the guitar in her lap.

"Now then, play—go on," and his eyes danced as he watched her intently.

"Shall I sing, too?" she asked.

"Sing? Of course—by all means! Sing."

It was a sweet, stirring song that the young girl rendered—accompanying herself on the guitar with clear, mellow, liquid chords.

He listened raptly.

The ladies, who had retired to a window, ceased their conversation as the child's voice—which was cultured beyond belief—awoke soft, murmuring strains of music such as had never before been heard in the broad parlors of that fashion-draped edifice.

"Bravo! Bravo!" he exclaimed, delightedly, clapping his hands when she had finished. "Ladies, did you hear? There's music in that, I—"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Mrs. Cruffold, carelessly; "we often hear a melodious ditty on the curbstone of the street—by children who never knew who their parents were. But—ayho!" (a half sigh and yawn)—"I suppose music is all the more enchanting from the lips of an artful siren," and with a curl of her aristocratic lip, she turned again to look out through the window.

The guitar nigh fell from Pearl's lap. The situation cut her to the heart, and there was an expression of acute pain in her lovely face, as the deep blue eyes turned quickly on the speaker.

Cyrus Cruffold reddened to the temples. He wheeled upon his wife with a suddenness that was alarming. And, for the first time since his marriage, he spoke harshly.

"Madam, understand me; this is no mere street child—no common waif—no offspring of shame—no escaped straw from a bed of vice! She is a good, pure, beautiful girl, whom I love—do you hear me, madam? 'whom I love!' And we will do well to hope that our children may be as finely cultured as she is. I say again, madam, do you understand me?"

It was the outburst of an honest anger—the justified resentment of a true champion.

An ominous stillness fell upon them.

Pearl went to the side of the woman who had spoken the unkind words.

"Madam," she said, in her low, sweet voice, "I am very, very sorry that you think any thing wrong of me. Indeed, my name is as good as yours—untainted and as high in standing. But if my presence is unpleasant to you, I'll go away, at once. Shall I?"

And Estelle Berkely, looking out through the window-pane, thought to herself:

"Yes, little one, if anything, your name is better than hers. I know you, Pearl Rochestine, and I am wondering what all this mystery means."

But almost before Pearl had ceased speaking Cyrus pulled her away, with:

"No you won't do anything of the kind! you'll stay right here in this house, just as long as you please, and those who don't like the arrangement can make the best of it—"

"I cannot intrude," protested Pearl.

"But you shall! If you don't stay of your own accord, I'll lock you up! Madam"—to Mrs. Cruffold—"probably you imagine that I am mad—but I am not; I am angry—I am surprised—hear? Don't let this thing happen again in my house. I regret that it has ever gone this far—but this child worships the same God I do, and, by her purity and golden attributes, demands protection!" and he drew Pearl

to him affectionately, while she could have fallen on her knees before him, in her gratefulness of heart.

He was indeed a protector.

He was angered almost to spitefulness; for in his generous heart the friendless child had already won a place of affection that no outside influence could disturb except to strengthen.

"Come," he said, "play another tune—for me."

"No, Mr. Cruffold, I cannot play again."

He saw what she meant, and chafed the more.

"On the piano, then—can you play on the piano?"

"Yes, a little—"

"Play for me, then. I say, for me."

"Don't ask me, Mr. Cruffold. I would be glad to do anything to please you, but—I'll never touch another instrument in your house again—never."

He took her gently by the wrist and strode out into the hall.

"Go to your room now, Pearl, and don't give anybody a chance to hurt your feelings. I've got to go out. I'll be back soon, and we'll take a ride together—and go shopping, too. Remember—if you run away, I'll send detectives after you and bring you back," and ere Pearl knew what he intended, he snatched a quick kiss from her lips—then slapped on his hat and went out, banging the door after him.

Mrs. Cruffold did not learn anything from her husband, in regard to the child, as a consequence of this little domestic explosion; the days went by, without an explanation of the mystery, and her curiosity augmented in proportion, with no prospects of its satiation.

Estelle Berkely made friends with Pearl. She sought out the young girl, every day—was kind and affectionate toward her.

The child did not dream that the woman who was gradually winning her love had encompassed the destruction of her father.

A sort of remorse had seized upon Estelle Berkely; and, in that feeling, she was striving to atone, by forcing herself to love the child of the man whose infatuation with her had led him to the point of a rival's sword.

She knew well enough who Pearl was, but kept the knowledge to herself, while she assisted Cyrus Cruffold in making her happy.

But she wondered, all the time, how it was that Pearl happened in such circumstances. Cruffold told her all he had learned from the young girl's lips; but Pearl would not disclose more than what she had uttered on the night she first met the generous friend who was doing so much for her, and who, by his acts of kindness, was sowing sunbeams through the clouds of her eventful life.

To their repeated questions she was firm, yet gently reticent.

So the first week went by. The second had near slipped round, when one day, while Pearl and Estelle were seated in the parlor, glancing over some drawings, the latter asked, suddenly: "What are you thinking about, Pearl? Tell me."

"I will, Miss Berkely. I've made up my mind to go away."

"What! Oh, no—quit jesting. Those are serious words, Pearl."

"And I feel serious when I speak so, Miss Berkely."

She saw that the child was deeply in earnest.

"Why, Pearl, what can this mean?"

"Maybe I am wrong," she said, gazing down, and speaking in a hushed tone, "but I think I am right. Mrs. Cruffold almost hates me—and I don't know why, for I have tried ever so hard to deserve her love. Ever since the day I came here, she has kept away from me, wherever I move; and I can see that Mr. Cruffold is worried about it. I don't want to make their lives unhappy—I know too well what sorrow is, to bring it on any one; so I've made up my mind to go away—though it will nearly—break—my—heart."

"She has a soul of gold!" thought Estelle Berkely, as her bosom warmed anew toward the child.

Ere they could speak further, a servant announced two visitors without cards.

Estelle glanced up in surprise; then a startled look came into her face.

"Visitors? to see me?"

"Yes'm."

"Admit them."

The comers were Kirk Brand and Neal Hardress.

"Is this Miss Estelle Berkely?" he asked, politely, though it was only politeness, for he knew her well.

"It is," she answered, rising.

"Then, madam, we have rather an unpleasant duty to perform."

"Yes—very unpleasant," supplemented Brand.

"Well, what is it?" she demanded.

The startled look in her face was more perceptible, the hand that Pearl held began to tremble.

"We are detectives, madam, of the London force. It is seldom our duties compel us to such a case as this; but business is business, you know, and when the law commands we must obey. I am very sorry, but—"

"You are here, then, to arrest me!" she nearly screamed, in a sudden desperation.

"Yes, madam, to arrest you," said Hardress, as quietly as possible. "Let me hope that you will obey the summons of the law, without force."

"O-h, God! I have been expecting this, day after day. It has come at last!"

She buried her face in her hands and her head bowed hopelessly down.

"Why, Miss Berkely," cried Pearl, winding her arms around her, "what do they mean? What have you done to be arrested?"

"Pearl! Pearl Rochestine, they are going to arrest me for murder! But I am innocent—I swear I am innocent of the horrible crime!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PHYSICIAN'S GREAT LOSS.

AGAIN we take the reader back to the city of London, and to the night of the duel fought in the quiet retreat of Lord Chauncy's spacious grounds.

The worthy physician who had been called in as a party to the affair rode off in high glee, after carefully covering up all sign of the presence of his ghastly charge.

"Aha!" he broke forth, giving the reins a jerk, and smiling complacently, "a good arrangement this—very good! A lucky affair—very lucky! Ahem—m—m!" (with another jerk) "a fine corpse—very fine! A good subject—an admirable dissection—ahem! a valuable skeleton. Theophilus Thump—you vagabond!—you're a fortunate man!"

And as he drove on, along the byway, he thought and muttered, smiled and chuckled, and congratulated himself on being called in and favored by the nobleman.

The bargain had been that Doctor Theophilus Thump should have a dead body to carry away from the dueling ground—no matter who fell.

Turning into a narrow road that led up to the gateway of his residence, he gave his thoughts vent for a second time, as he saw the glimmer of a light from a window in the upper story.

"Aha! Theophilus Thump, you're a remarkably fortunate man. Now, what would my fat little wife say, if she only knew what a sociable companion I've got in here, eh? Ha! ha! lock the door on me, no doubt. Yes, my dear—sleep on; let the light burn; I've business to perform. No sleep for me—oh, no! Eh? what's that, now?"

He started and listened. He was sure he heard a sound, something like a groan, a strained sigh, though it was very faint.

He leaned forward, and glanced out at the side of his gig.

The road was lone, and silent, and though every object was distinctly visible in the moonlight, he saw neither beast nor human.

"Wonder what it was? Eh?—bless my heart! There it is again."

The nervous little doctor looked suspiciously at the white posts of the fence and listened anew.

Suddenly his jaws fell. His face paled, and the fingers that held the reins clutched the latter rigidly. His eyes stared widely, and he sat like one petrified.

Another low, half-smothered groan.

There was a frantic scramble, an agile leap, and Theophilus Thump, dropping the reins, landed on the "dash" of the gig, with hair on end, and whole appearance that of a man amazed, terrified, incredulous and anxious to escape the clutch of an imaginary ghost.

The horse stopped abruptly, nearly pitching Thump headlong out, and while the medical worthy struggled to recover his balance, he squealed:

"Hello, here! Lord bless my heart! Aren't you, DEAD?"

Horace Rochestine's eyes were gazing at him with a bewildered, vacant stare; and their owner asked, faintly:

"What has happened? Where am I?"
 "What the devil do you mean, sir?" cried Thump, snappishly. "I thought you were certainly dead!"

"Dead?"
 "Yes, sir, 'dead!' I was going to cut you into pieces within half an hour—and here you've spoiled all my calculations. You're a nice fellow! Demmy, sir, you've no more consideration for the progress of medical science than if there was no need of it!"

Horace Rochestine was far from being a dead man.

Lord Chauncy's sword had penetrated the right side, glanced upon a rib, and emerged at the back, beneath the shoulder-blade, producing a wound, severe but not necessarily dangerous; and the shock to the system had caused a temporary insensibility that was mistaken for death, considering the circumstances under which it was occasioned.

But the physician's disappointment quickly wore itself out, and he applied himself, now, to the important task of preserving a human life. Instead of a subject for dissection, he had secured a rich patient.

Horace Rochestine was carefully nursed at the house of Theophilus Thump, who, when he had ascertained the nature of the wound, saw that the patient, who possessed a strong constitution, would soon recover.

And as he lay upon the couch, he had opportunity to review all that had happened.

Under affliction, our improper courses in life are mountained before us; and it is then, if ever, that our conscience manufactures its own censure, and discovers the hitherto smothered voice of our better nature.

In the silence of the bedroom, he thought of that wife in America, toward whom he had acted so basely, for it cannot be called otherwise; and of his child—of Pearl, who, unknown to him then, was to suffer so much through his faithlessness and sheer desertion.

Golden resolves formed within him during those lone hours; and from the bottom of his now changed heart, he cursed the infatuation which had led him to deviate from the path of right and honor, and which had wrought his present condition of helplessness.

"I've news for you!" exclaimed Thump, a few days after the duel, as he sat by the side of his rapidly-improving patient.

"What is it?"

"Your rival, Lord Chauncy, has had a very narrow escape."

"How?"

"Pretty near had his life stamped out, that's all!" said Thump, with a long breath.

"Explain."

"Aha! that's just it—'explain.' Do it if you can. That's what we're after. We want an explanation—if we can get it. Lord Chauncy was found by his valet, lying in bed, almost strangled to death—at first it was thought that he was dead. But—lucky vagabond!—he still lives. Poor fellow! he's been terribly deceived, too."

"Deceived? How? Doctor, you are exciting me."

"Am I? 'Um! Keep cool—keep cool. You know Estelle Berkely?"

"I believe I do," with a bitter curl of the lip.

"Well, Lord Chauncy was to have married her soon. He made a will, leaving nearly everything to her, in it. On the night of the attempted murder, this will was found on the stairway, between the library and the lower hall: and Estelle Berkely, she—"

"Yes—Estelle Berkely."

"She had disappeared."

"She gone?"

"That's the rub. Lord Chauncy nearly killed—Estelle Berkely missing—the will found on the stairway—see, eh, see?"

"Very suspicious," said Rochestine, thoughtfully.

"Rather, and the authorities are after her."

"Ah!"

"They traced her to Liverpool—found that she'd gone to America. Detectives are now on the track. See?"

"Deceitful, treacherous woman!" he exclaimed, and his words meant more than the other imagined.

Horace Rochestine recovered in a remarkably short time, and with his returning strength, he determined to return at once to his native land, and communicated that determination to the physician.

"More news!" exclaimed Thump, coming in one day, while Horace was in the parlor, conversing with the estimable wife of the doctor.

"Well?" said Rochestine, inquiringly.

"Your friend, Percy Wolfe, is in a confounded difficulty, that's all."

"Ha! Wolfe in trouble!—what mean you?"

"Easy. Don't excite yourself. You see, facts are, your sudden disappearance has been remarked. That 'remark' has assumed the proportions of a universal inquiry. The authorities are into it, and they want to know why Percy Wolfe left London in such a hurry."

"This never struck me before—"

"Me neither," broke in Thump.

"I must set the suspicions at rest, immediately. Wolfe is a good, tried friend, and he must not suffer on my account. I'm off to-morrow, doctor."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes. I have no time to spare."

And on the day following, in company with Thump, he made his existence and safety known to the authorities; after which, he shook hands in farewell with the medical gentleman—then bade adieu to the scenes that were distasteful to his sight, and renounced the associations that had ever been unpleasant, even though he had striven to make them otherwise.

In due time he was on the deck of a steamship destined to his native shore; and soon he was speeding forward on that eager trip that was to reunite him with the loved things his heart so yearned for.

As he stood looking over the bulwark, into the rippling, waving depths of green, he murmured to himself:

"England! farewell forever. America! my home! wife! child! I am coming to you for forgiveness!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LONG TRAIL.

PERCY WOLFE, instead of leaving Baltimore for the West, with his sister, on their errand of justice, went out on the 10:40 P. M. train for New York, under close guard.

"Gentlemen," he said, protestingly, as the cars moved away from the city, "I tell you there is some great mistake here. I am not guilty of anything wrong toward Hora—toward Herod Dean."

"Never knew a rascal yet, but what he was ready to swear himself innocent as a baby," grunted Brand.

The young man flushed.

"I am no rascal!" he exclaimed with vehemence.

Brand looked at him in a peculiar way.

"Suspicion is rather a stubborn thing," said Hardress, dryly.

"Tell me—what can it all mean?"

"Plain as a stump speech," answered Brand. "Herod Dean disappeared from the city of London. He was a man too well known not to be missed! and as there couldn't be found any cause for his voluntary departure, without a word of warning to even his most intimate friends, why, the authorities suspected foul play—and I don't blame 'em."

"I am an American, and an honest man—" began Percy, with warmth; but Brand interrupted him.

"Can't help it if you're a Hong Kong peddler—nor if you're twice as honest as you think you are. Biz is biz all the world over. But, mind, I didn't say it was *believed* that you'd done anything to the man who was your roommate, I only said you were *wanted*. And as I'm not judge or jury on the case—merely a deputy—I don't care to argue it one way or the other," the last in a tone that plainly meant, "There's no use in saying any more about it."

Wolfe relapsed into silence. He fully comprehended the unfortunate state of affairs.

Should he make known the fact of his participation in the duel, in which he believed his friend to have been killed? But, what use? these men, who were simply obeying the law, would not credit his story; or, if they did, they could not release him. And, besides, he had sworn not to reveal what he knew. "If the worst comes, though," he reasoned, inwardly, "I must violate my oath of secrecy. Lord Chauncy must be made to testify—and the physician also. But, in the meantime, I will be taken to London—there is no help for it. And what will become of Nellie? Pearl? Ah! how unfortunate."

These thoughts were torturous beyond expression.

Upon their arrival in New York the detectives repaired at once to headquarters, to report on their success and telegraph to London.

Imagine their surprise when a telegram from London was handed them which read:

"Herod Dean found. No case. He left here yesterday for New York."

Brand and Hardress congratulated their prisoner on the happy turn, and quickly released him.

"Herod Dean found!" exclaimed the young man, as he stared in blank amazement at the words of the telegram.

He could scarce believe his eyes.

Had he not seen Horace Rochestine fall dead beneath the sword-blade of Lord Chauncy? It was strange, very strange, to him.

But the telegram was dated a good way back. It had lain there a long time waiting for the parties to whom it was addressed. The officials in New York had telegraphed to Brand and Hardress, at several points, after its receipt, but through some fate the detectives never received the notice—never being at the different points when the successive messages came.

More, the telegram said that the missing man was on his way to America. Glancing again at the date, Wolfe saw that his friend—if all this was true—was, at that moment, due in New York.

It is impossible to describe his feelings as he waited the arrival of the overdue steamship.

And when Horace Rochestine did come, and the two faithful friends met, it was a meeting easier to be imagined than depicted in words.

Explanations were many. In a short space the husband was made aware of the plot that was progressing round his home, and then, like two thirsty hounds loosed from the leash, they sprang to pursuit of the man who was so treacherously betraying the confidence that had been reposed in him.

Wolfe wanted Brand and Hardress to accompany and aid him. But these worthy gentlemen had received orders to join Sales—the detective they had met in Baltimore—in his search after Estelle Berkely.

They said they had "a piece of new work on hand," but Wolfe engaged them to search for Pearl Rochestine after they had finished up what was then demanding their attention.

Then, with hearts eager and beating in stern purpose, the two reunited friends started westward on the track of Claude Paine.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BIRTH OF THE SUNBEAMS.

WE return to Claude Paine, whom we left standing in the doorway of his apartment, at the Southern Hotel, St. Louis, scowling in angry astonishment as he read, from the card just handed him, that name whose owner he hated and feared simultaneously.

The rustle of Nellie's dress, as she approached him, drew his attention from the card.

"You here!" he cried, amazedly.

"Yes, Claude Paine, I am here. When I saw you last, I told you we might meet again. We have met, you see."

"What do you mean by that tone?" he demanded, catching a significance in her words.

"I have followed you, Claude Paine, all the way from Baltimore," Nellie said, quickly. "I have been upon your track, wherever you went—"

"For what purpose?" he interrupted, harshly.

The servant had drawn back a pace, and was staring with mouth agape.

"To wreak the punishment of justice, in two causes: first for attempting to rob Pearl Rochestine of her inheritance; second—oh! monstrous villain that you are!—for sending my sister, Diamond, broken-hearted to her grave—"

"Why, Miss Byrnel—you here? Claude?—and frowning? This is strange; what does it mean?" The voice was Isabel Rochestine's.

"Madam," said Nellie, with an assumption of graceful haughtiness, "I am about to expose the villain you have seen fit to bestow your love upon."

Isabel frowned. Claude Paine smiled sneeringly, and displayed his white, regular teeth beneath his fine mustache, as he asked:

"And pray, madam, or miss, how do you expect to prove all this foul slander upon me?"

"I believe the girl is crazy!" whispered Isabel, clinging to his arm.

"Undoubtedly!" he indorsed, with emphasis.

"No, madam, I am not crazy!" exclaimed Nellie; and she added, fixing her eyes piercingly on Paine: "You ask me how I will prove this? You shall learn soon enough. Now, if

you're not a coward, such as your past actions would seem to stamp you, then answer the summons of that card you hold in your hand. Go, sir—face him if you dare. He is my brother, and the brother of that trusting girl whose love you won that you might throw it away. Ah! you turn pale! Go, sir—see him if you have the courage; you'll find him an honest man, and one who knows how to deal with a scoundrel!"

One fierce, momentary glance, that burned with all the savage hate capable to his evil heart. Claude Paine bestowed upon the girl who so defiantly confronted him.

Never till then had it struck him that the Percy Wolfe who was on his track was the brother of Diamond Wolfe, she who had fallen victim to his passions in past years.

This realization, added to his already perilous situation, was sufficient to effectually frighten any ordinary man from the dangerous ground. But Claude Paine was bold as well as hazardous by nature, and far from being terrified by the gripings of that cowardice, characteristic of the meaner class of his kind, when suddenly met by obstacles and fearful odds.

Nellie, after the delivery of her stinging speech, turned and hurried in the direction of the parlor.

"Claude, this is all very strange; who is it wishes to see you?"

"That mysterious individual who called to see you in Washington—Percy Wolfe."

Not the slightest evidence of a disturbed mind; he was calm as the air of a tomb.

"Is it possible? What can he want?—that he should follow us about? I am inclined to believe he is some stray lunatic, after what he said to me about Horace's having sent his will over so long ago, and no sign of it yet."

He bowed acquiescingly.

"I've a notion not to see him," he said.

"Oh, yes; for mercy's sake grant him an interview. Let us find out his errand and be rid of him. Come, I will accompany you."

"But his errand may be dangerous to our love, Isabel."

"How?" she inquired, unsuspectingly.

"He may have some outrageous story prepared for your ears—one intended to ruin your love for me. Whatever it may be, I assure you it is all a vile plot against my honor. In fact, I am partially aware of such a plot being in existence."

"Come, let us go and see him. Depend upon it, Claude, if he touches upon anything reflecting wrong upon you, I will order him from my presence—and so we will be rid of him for all time hereafter."

Again Claude Paine bowed, and there was a peculiar triumphant twitching of the mouth's corners, as they proceeded toward the parlor.

He felt sure in imagining that *nothing* could affect this proud, beautiful woman's love for him.

But at the parlor door they paused. A tableau, unexpected as it was startling, met their gaze—and its center was Horace Rochestine.

Isabel was as if turned to stone. All color fled from her face, and her large, lustrous eyes dilated in a half-wild, incredulous stare.

Upon Claude Paine the effect was electrical. A single sharp, hissing oath burst from his lips, and he dashed off along the corridor, running at the top of his speed.

As he bounded down the stairway, he collided with a man who was just then being "shown up" by one of the waiters.

It was Derrick.

"Hello, Paine! What's up? Satan after you?"

"Worse!" cried the chagrined villain. "The cake's dough! Rochestine is up-stairs, and there's the very Old Harry to pay!"

"P-h-e-w!"

The two left in quick time. The first train going out—we forget which way—took the two plotters among other passengers, and they have not been seen since.

We will not attempt to describe the scene of reunion between husband and wife; nor to depict Isabel's astonishment when she learned the true character of the man to whom she had yielded up her heart in her supposed widowhood.

But all was explained, all was for aiven, and to-day, once more in their old home at Washington, with many of the tried servants restored to their familiar places, she is less a woman of the world, and loves her husband as she might never have loved him, had it not been for the lesson taught her by her narrow escape from the perpetration of a crime.

The old house in Washington looks, as it was

ever wont—for Pearl, too, was there—Pearl, the bright, sunny fairy of old, around whose life there hovered for a time the somber clouds of woe. She is happy as in those days before the first fall of sorrow came.

The meeting between father and child is another subject for the reader's imagination, and let it be one of the brightest pictures of joy that ever warmed the bosom or made wet the eye!

Miss Byrne (Nellie Wolfe) is with her former pupil—no longer a mere governess, for Horace Rochestine, when he learned that Percy really had no definite home in view, would not hear of any thing but that his tried, faithful friend should live with him. The two men have grown to be brothers.

Nellie, with her disposition of sweet gentleness, was quick to forgive all the unkind thrusts she had endured from Isabel, and the two women are like loving sisters.

Pearl had been restored to her father and mother by Brand and Hardsess, the two detectives.

When they had arrested Estelle Berkely, they had distinctly heard the name she used in addressing Pearl. It was enough. In due time the child was brought to those who loved her, and whom she so dearly loved.

Estelle Berkely had not been taken away further than New York. A second dispatch, just received, was handed to the detectives, ordering her release.

The guilty party in the strangling affair was Lord Chauncy's valet—and the object was robbery, which he accomplished. The fellow had just died, and had made a confession ere his life went out.

But Estelle Berkely has disappeared from society—perhaps is living in obscurity, or is dead without our knowledge.

The sunbeams are pouring through the clouds!

And now to Pearl, the child of beauty with a heart of gold, we say farewell—wishing for her all the blisses that gem a life of happiness whose brimming pleasures may not fade, whose earthly future may be bright, and feastful in the noble attributes of glorious womanhood!

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